POLITICAL ADVENTURES
OF
LORD BEACONSFIELD.

DA564
.B3P7

3.25.'01.

PRESENTED TO THE LIBRARY

OF

PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

BY

Professor Henry van Dyke, D.D., LL.D.

DA564
.B3P7

E. T. Mason,
1866.

LORD BEACONSFIELD.

THE

POLITICAL ADVENTURES

OF

LORD BEACONSFIELD.

NEW YORK:
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS,
743 AND 745 BROADWAY.

PUBLISHERS' NOTE.

THE remarkable papers here reprinted appeared anonymously in the *Fortnightly Review* at the moment when the career of their subject reached its apparent climax. The fact that recent events have made Lord Beaconsfield for the time a central figure in European politics, has called a more than national attention to this brilliant and incisive analysis; and the same fact gives a sufficient reason for its republication in America, even while—for the public at least—the question of its authorship is still unsolved.

THE POLITICAL ADVENTURES OF

LORD BEACONSFIELD.

I.

LORD BEACONSFIELD'S career has been reviewed at different stages of it by many able critics and biographers variously affected to their subject. Perhaps the time has now come when it may be expedient to take another survey of it. Lord Beaconsfield has reached a point beyond which it is not constitutionally possible that he should pass. He cannot be more than Prime Minister of England and a peer of the realm. Whatever be the duration of his premiership and his parliamentary life, his career will simply be continued; it can scarcely have new features. The point will be lengthened into a line, and that is all. The record is not closed, but there

cannot be much to add to it of a kind likely to affect its general character or the public judgment. Lord Beaconsfield has been the subject of bitter attack and of unscrupulous praise. His career has been described as demoralising to the national character, and as lowering the standard and aims of English politics. We should say that it is rather unmoralising than demoralising. We are, at any rate, not conscious of depraving influences as the result of a continuous survey of it; its effects seem to be merely privative. Lord Beaconsfield appears somehow or other to be outside the sphere of moral judgment. You do not, as a too indulgent critic said of the dramatists of the Restoration, get into a world in which considerations of right and wrong have no place, but you see introduced into the affairs of the ordinary world a creature to whom apparently these considerations do not apply. Like the Sorcerer, in Mr. Gilbert's play, he moves about taking part in all that concerns men's businesses and bosoms, wearing the dress, speaking the language, using the slang, and not exempt from the other vulgarities of ordinary life. Still you feel that he has come from another world, and that he is to be judged by the law

of his domicile, wherever that may be, rather than by the rule according to which Englishmen pass moral sentence upon each other. Robin Goodfellow, or the Elfin King, or any other weird or graceful creature of extra-natural superstition, seems to have as much connection with our prosaic world as the Earl of Beaconsfield. If some fine day he should cast aside his peer's robes, and the dull vesture of decay which seems to hem him in less closely and more incongruously than it sits upon other men, and if he should appear in a blaze of light as the Genius of the Gardens of Joy, or descend in red fire through a trap-door, the transformation would not appear more strange or theatrical than many incidents of his history. On the whole, we are not disposed to think that Lord Beaconsfield has done as much harm to political morality as might be thought likely. People have declined to think of political morality in connection with him; they have found it impossible to associate the two ideas, and therefore it has escaped injury or deterioration. He has done most mischief by the sort of charm which he has exercised over creatures of a different sphere. He has tempted ungainly mortals of respectable character, successful

parliamentary lawyers, and squires moulded out of their own heavy clays, to imitate his wanton and sportive gambols with a result to which no Æsopian fable can do justice. He has done Sir William Harcourt and Mr. Henry Chaplin much harm. On the other hand, he has been of some use to the British public. He has helped to prevent them from taking life and politics too ponderously; he has stimulated their sense of wonder, and applied incentives to the somewhat slow and feeble imagination of a rather dull and prosaic community. From the beginning Lord Beaconsfield has at least never failed to pique curiosity. We propose to try and satisfy it by following, in two or three articles, his political life. Before essaying to do so, it may be well to endeavour to get some general idea of the influences of race, of ancestry, and of contemporary circumstances which at least contributed to make the man what he was and is. Lord Beaconsfield's parliamentary career began with the first session of the first parliament of the present reign. In some respects no single life more instructively connects and illustrates the various aspects of the Victorian epoch of our history.

Very early in his career, Lord Beaconsfield—or as

he then used to style himself, Disraeli the Younger—published a pamphlet with the title, "What is He?" The He in question was of course Mr. Disraeli, who has always been a good deal occupied with himself. The inquiry to which in this instance he volunteered a reply is said to have been made in conversation by the late Earl Grey. The Whig chief had heard with amazement, and probably some feeling of half articulate indignation, of a young man unknown in the lobbies and saloons, unvouched for either by Mr. Ellice or by Lady Holland, who had ventured to stand against one of Lord Grey's sons as a candidate for High Wycombe, that "very respectable street" which subsequently had the honour of being represented by Mr. Bernal Osborne, who paid historic tribute to it in the phrase which we have just quoted. On a later occasion, when a candidate for another constituency, Mr. Disraeli explained to a plebeian inquirer, as curious as Lord Grey, that High Wycombe was a borough in Buckinghamshire belonging to his father, who, he added with a certain territorial pride which has marked him through his career, owned property in three counties. Since Dogberry modestly vaunted his possession of two gowns and

everything handsome about him, a more ingenuously pleasing declaration has not been made. Unhappily the pamphlet in which the younger Disraeli stood and unfolded himself for the edification of Lord Grey has perished. It is unknown to the shelves of the British Museum. It remains dispersed over a multitude of scattered trunks, defying the industry of the most indefatigable collector to bring them together and to reconstruct it. The loss is to be deplored. In this little work Lord Beaconsfield stood forth, avowing in substance: "I am my own interpreter, and I will make it plain."

The pamphlet is probably, like its author, unique in English, or in any other literature. There have been men in abundance who have written apologies and confessions, some of which the world could have very well spared. They have given an account of the things they have done and of the motives by which they were actuated. Lord Beaconsfield took a different course. He began his career by writing a preface to a life of which scarcely the first pages were composed, and of which nobody had at that time shown any disposition to turn the leaves. In one of his essays, Dr. James Martineau refers to a German

play in which Adam is introduced crossing the stage, going to be created. This is something like the position in which Mr. Disraeli presents himself in this early explanation of himself to the wondering mind of the old Whig peer. The loss of Mr. Disraeli's early treatise upon himself is irreparable, and there is no use in shedding more tears over it. In one sense the pamphlet and the question to which it offers a reply may be considered as prefiguring the attitude of the public to Lord Beaconsfield and Lord Beaconsfield's attitude towards himself. For fifty years "the great lubber," as he somewhere styles the nation which has made him Prime Minister, has been rubbing its eyes and scratching its head and asking, with a perplexed amazement like Lord Grey's, "What is He?" Lord Beaconsfield in his turn has made reply, during half a century, in speeches and essays and novels, which together form a considerable bulk of literature. Still his countrymen ask, "What is he?" So we get no further. He is himself alone. To explain is to refer to more general categories. Lord Beaconsfield can scarcely be classified; no one but himself can be his parallel.

Nevertheless attempts have been made from time to

time to gather together the scattered voices and to put some sort of interpretation upon them. They are likely to be continued. An enigma however trivial, a mystery however worthless, piques curiosity; and Lord Beaconsfield's strange character and fortunes, neither trivial nor worthless, will always possess a certain degree of interest for the student of human nature in its more eccentric and whimsical developments. In the dull succession of arch mediocrities who for the greater part make up the list of English prime ministers, his fantastic figure must always draw attention and stimulate speculation. How he came to be what he was and where he is, is likely to be a theme of mildly renewed surprise and conjectural explanation for many generations. A Hebrew proverb which Lord Beaconsfield quotes in one of his novels, speaking of what is to happen in the fulness of time, announces that "We shall yet see an ass mount a ladder." We are reluctant to quote the proverb in this connection; but the ass, it must be remembered, is in the East a very fleet, spirited, and beautiful creature, and is held there in high and just esteem. Lord Beaconsfield, if we recollect rightly, applies the proverb to the wonderful elevation of his own wonderful

Alroy, who, from being the prince of the captivity, became the King of Judah and the deliverer of his people. In a similar sense, and disembarrassed of the injurious associations with which centuries of oppression and domestic servitude have surrounded a once noble and still useful quadruped, the image may be applied to Lord Beaconsfield. The Hebrew proverb has received its fulfilment: we have seen the ass mount the ladder. Not only so, he has maintained himself there as if the posture and situation were natural. This personal elevation may, perhaps, be considered as part of a more general phenomenon. It applies not only to Lord Beaconsfield, but to the historic race of which he is one of the most remarkable illustratory ornaments. Some time ago a respectable member of Parliament in arguing some question, we forget what, found it necessary to recall to the recollection of his hearers the historic fact that we do not now live under the Mosaic dispensation. Lord Beaconsfield held office at the time, and gazed at the orator from the Treasury bench. The Opposition laughed. Even the docile ministerialists tittered and coughed The impression seemed to prevail that we do live in some sense under a Mosaic dispensation.

In administration, in finance, and in journalism, Jewish influences notoriously shape and guide English politics. This is not a new thing in European history, though in England it is now more pronounced and obvious than it has ever been before. The phenomenon itself, however, is two thousand years old. In the latest volume of his Histoire des Origines du Christianisme, M. Renan, speaking of Josephus, says: "Il avait cette facilité superficielle qui fait que le Juif, transporté dans une civilisation qui lui est étrangère, se met avec une merveilleuse prestesse au courant des idées au milieu desquelles il se trouve jeté, et voit par quel côté il peut les exploiter." The same phenomenon is observable now. The politicians and journalists who carry on the largest trade in patriotic phrases and national prejudices, are Jews who, like Josephus, transported into a civilisation which is foreign to them have placed themselves with marvellous dexterity in the current of the ideas which float about them in order to find a means of turning them to account. In one of his early papers, Thackeray describes an incident at a city dinner: "The Royal health having been imbibed, the professional gentlemen ejaculated a part of the national anthem;

and I do not mean any disrespect to them personally in mentioning that this eminently religious hymn was performed by Messrs. Shadrach and Meshech, two well-known melodists of the Hebrew persuasion." Later in the evening, "the elderly Hebrew gentleman before mentioned began striking up a wild patriotic ditty about the 'Queen of the Isles' on whose sea-girt shores the bright sun smiles and the ocean roars, whose cliffs never knew, since the bright sun rose, but a people true who scorned all foes." Practically this has been the course of politics during the last two years. The parliamentary Shadrachs and the journalistic Meshechs have been singing the national anthem and patriotic melodies to an amused and excited audience who have shouted and banged their glasses, and have believed in the spontaneity and disinterestedness and genuine British feeling of Shadrach and Meshech and the other Hebrew gentleman, who pays these pipers.

Everybody who has read Lord Beaconsfield's novels must recollect one of the cleverest things in any of them,—the conversation in Tancred about The Revelations of Chaos, a work which occupied the world of Lord Beaconsfield's characters at the time when the

world of flesh and blood was talking about The Vestiges of Creation. "You know all is development: the principle is perpetually going on. First, there was nothing, then there was something; then, I forget the next, I think there were shells, then fishes; then we came. Let me see—did we come next? Never mind that, we came at last: and the next change, there will be something very superior to us; something with wings. Ah, that's it: we were fishes and I believe we shall be crows." No one, however proud he may be of having been a fish, or however anxious he may be to become a crow, can object to banter of this kind which, like the noises in Prospero's island, "gives delight and hurts not" even the doctrine which it plays with. Earlier, however, in his course of philosophic speculation, Lord Beaconsfield had professed a different theory, which has more affinity than his later view with what is fundamental in his writings, and especially with his doctrine of race. In Contarini Fleming he sets forth the proposition that "the various tribes (of men) that people this globe, in all probability spring from different animals." Civilisation, he complains, has deserted the regions and intellects she once most

favoured. The Persians, the Arabs, the Greeks are now unlettered slaves in barbarous lands. "The arts are yielded to the flat-nosed Franks." Lord Beaconsfield has never been able to get over his dislike, or even to refrain from the expression of his deep-seated repugnance for the unfortunate Frankish nose. "And they toil and study and invent theories to account for their own incompetence. Now it is the climate, now the religion, now the government; everything but the mortifying suspicion that their organization may be different; that they may be as distinct a race from their models as they undoubtedly are from the Kalmuck and the negro." We may admit to Lord Beaconsfield that distinctions of race, whether they be aboriginal or derivative, of animal or of circumstantial origin, have at last been formed, and ought to be taken into account. There is no one from a consideration of whose life they can be less safely omitted than from his own. There is little need of reserve on the subject, for Lord Beaconsfield has practised none himself, and his relations to his own people are the most honourable and attractive element in his story.

Lord Beaconsfield is the most remarkable illustra

tion of his own doctrine of the ascendancy of Hebrew genius in modern Europe. The latest philosophy propounds that what is peculiar to himself in each individual is really a smaller part of him than the qualities which he derives from his personal ancestry and the race to which he and they belong. Lord Beaconsfield unites, in a manner which the history of his family explains, the qualities of the Hebrew and of the "super-subtle Venetian." In the sketch of his father's life which is prefixed to one of the editions of the Curiosities of Literature, he narrates the fortunes of his house. In the fifteenth century, some of his ancestors, driven from Spain by Torquemada and the Inquisition, took refuge in Venice. During two centuries they remained there. Possibly sufficiently careful research might detect some trace of them in the relics of the old Hebrew burial-ground on the Lido. Like Timon "entombed upon the very hem of the sea," these poor Jews have "made their everlasting mansion upon the beached verge of the salt flood." Slabs of stone, half buried into the earth or covered with grass and creeping vegetation, recall in their often still legible Hebrew characters the names and families of the Jews ban

ished in their death from the society in which they were barely tolerated during their lives. The favourable position of Mr. Pelham gave a new opening to Jewish enterprise in England towards the middle of the eighteenth century. In 1749 Benjamin Disraeli, the grandfather of the present Prime Minister, who may, perhaps, have had Shylock or Tubal among his ancestors, settled in England. At this time, Lord Beaconsfield records, "There might be found, among other Jewish families flourishing in this country, the Villa Reals, who brought wealth to these shores almost as great as their name, though that is the second in Portugal, and who have twice allied themselves with the English aristocracy: the Medinas, the Laras, who were our kinsmen, and the Mendez de Costas, who, I believe, still exist." Mr. Pelham's good intentions bore fruit, but not very lasting fruit. The Jews' Naturalisation Bill, which he succeeded in passing in 1753, was repealed the next year after his death by the Duke of Newcastle, under the influence of a popular and ecclesiastical clamour which must have taught the Venetian emigrant that he had little to expect from liberal opinion in England. Sir John Barnard put the conclusive argument that if the Jews

were allowed to hold land in this country, all security would be gone for the maintenance of Christianity as the fashionable religion. But the argument of the streets was yet more decisive. Political recognition would probably have cost the Jews such social toleration as they enjoyed by the connivance of interest rather than that of generosity or friendship. If the policy of Mr. Pelham had been persisted in and extended, the character and career of the present Prime Minister might have been very different from that which we propose to examine. The Jewish families, his among the rest, were forced to remain foreigners and Israelites. They were not allowed to become Englishmen. The development of a new species, by the process of evolution and transformation, is, according to the most trustworthy authorities in natural history, a very slow one, except in cases of very rare flexibility. There has not yet been time for the conversion of the Jew into the true Briton. This would require Ovid's metamorphosis, and not Darwin's. Certainly a century and a quarter of residence in England on the part of his ancestors and himself has left little trace on the mind and character of Lord Beaconsfield. He is in almost every essential point far

more of a Venetian and a Jew than of an Englishman. The two cities to which his imagination stretches backwards most constantly and affectionately are Jerusalem and Venice. They enter into his political visions, in which Lord Beaconsfield takes things a great deal more seriously than he does his dealings with practical English politics, in which there is always a great deal of make-believe, too obvious to be called deceptive. Thackeray has remarked upon the odd fate which sent Mr. G. P. R. James as consul to the only city in Europe in which it would be impossible for him to encounter the two horsemen, at least with their horses, who figure on the first page of nearly all his romances. It was an odder destiny which derived the champion of the British territorial interest and landed aristocracy from a race debarred from owning property in land, and from a city in which from the nature of the case a territorial aristocracy could not exist. Perhaps the principle of reaction and antagonism made the descendant of a family of Venetian Jews, the champion and representative of the large-acred lords and squires of England. More probably it was his possession in the nineteenth century of that faculty which Renan has

noted in the Jew of the first century. It is another instance of the wonderful dexterity of the Hebrew in throwing himself into the current of ideas foreign to him, and of humouring the prejudices of the people among whom he may be thrown for his own advantage.

Lord Beaconsfield has described the home of his grandfather at Enfield in a few delicate yet distinct touches. The Venetian settler was a zealous man of business and an accomplished man of the world. He occupied himself impartially in trade and pleasure, dividing his time between activity in making a fortune and the sweet indolence of its enjoyment. He laid out an Italian garden at Enfield, he played whist with Sir Horace Mann, he ate macaroni which was dressed by the Venetian consul—who, we hope, was worthy of the confidence thus reposed in him, and dressed his macaroni as skilfully as the Prime Minister in Contarini Fleming was reported to have made cream cheeses. Lord Beaconsfield, who was a lad of twelve when his grandfather died, draws his character with evident sympathy for it, both in its fine gentleman or macaroni aspect, and on its more strenuous business side. Perhaps there is some con-

sciousness of inherited qualities and aptitudes in his delineation of the Venetian emigrant as a man of "ardent character, sanguine, courageous, speculative and fortunate; with a temper which no disappointment could disturb and a brain amid reverses full of resource." In the sketch of his father there is more tenderness, and even a touch of something like affectionate compassion. Isaac Disraeli lived only in his library and his literary projects, careless of the politics of the day, and indeed utterly unintelligent of them. In these two men it is not perhaps fanciful to trace in addition to the workings of natural character and tastes, the influences of isolation from the society in which they lived, owing to the prejudices of race, religion, and the undefined social prescription thence derived, which hemmed them in in a sort of moral Ghetto or Juden Strasse. The grandfather sought a refuge in the ordinary commercial enterprises of the Jew and in the amusements of the exile. The father fled from his own world and his own time into the past and to his books. A sense of isolation and detachment was apparently impressed upon the household.

But to complete the understanding of the silent

influence of persons and feelings which is likely to have contributed insensibly to shape the character and aims of the lad who was afterwards to be Prime Minister of England, another figure needs to be sketched in the family group. Lord Beaconsfield has not omitted it from his picture of a Jewish interior, though it must have required some courage to draw its outlines, as he has done, with stern strokes and an unfaltering hand. In the two men, father and son, we see the flexible and accommodating nature of the Jew who bows to circumstances, and with a patient shrug lets the world pass in which he is disinherited and proscribed. But the Jewish character has another side than that of accommodation and acquiescence. It has a fierceness of hate and resentment which, when it cannot wreak its passions upon its enemies and persecutors, preys upon and rends itself. Lord Beaconsfield describes his grandmother as hating her race, and as detesting the very name which her marriage had given her, and which was a perpetual witness of her Jewish connexions. He adds that she was "so mortified by her social position that she lived until eighty without indulging a tender expression." It is perhaps from this strange figure,

in which it is easy to recognise in an introverted form the stern lineaments that have marked the zealots and fanatics of the race, that the author of Daniel Deronda has drawn the Jew-hating Jewess who is the mother of her hero. Lord Beaconsfield had never probably at any period of his career much in common with the amiable walking gentleman whom the genius of George Eliot has vainly endeavoured to convert into a man of thought and action. But Daniel Deronda could not more thoroughly and openly avow the ties of blood, which in spite of an ostensibly Christian profession and training bound him to his people, than Lord Beaconsfield has always done. So far as has depended upon himself, he has been faithful to the purpose of his ancestors, who on their escape from Spain to Venice "assumed the name of Disraeli, a name never borne before or since by any other family in order that their race might be forever recognised." Lord Beaconsfield has never been untrue in spirit to this virtual vow of a persecuted house, "grateful to the God of Jacob, who had sustained them through unprecedented trials, and guarded them through unheard-of perils." Perhaps on the whole, though the error is on the side of courage and manliness, he has

been almost too ostentatiously faithful to it. Judaism and the Jews have been thrust by him with an almost unnecessary pertinacity into English politics and literature. The consciousness of his race and of their faith seems never to escape him. Lord Beaconsfield has made that a matter of honourable pride, and even occasionally of something like bravado, which was to his ancestress one of life-long shame and torment. He has never been able to leave the matter alone, and to consider the question of Jew or Gentile as a thing socially and politically indifferent. Perhaps this would have been impossible in the midst of the prejudices of race and religion by which he has been surrounded, and in face of the coarse insults which those prejudices have occasionally prompted. Lord Beaconsfield's conduct on this point during the whole of his political and literary career is entitled to genuine and cordial respect. Even the extravagances into which he has been betrayed are extravagances of courageous championship and of manly self-assertion. They deserve indulgent and tender treatment. No one can judge of them fairly who does not keep in mind the mortifying and sometimes painful and cruel domestic experiences

out of which they have sprung. Of the builders of the Temple in Jerusalem it is recorded that "every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. For the builders every one had his sword girded by his side and so builded." In rebuilding the fortunes of their race in Europe the Jews have laboured under precisely similar conditions. Toiling under the eyes of watchful and relentless enmity, with one of their hands they have wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. In no one has this militant attitude, half defensive, half offensive, but only aggressive for the sake of more effectual self-defence, been more conspicuous and successful than in Lord Beaconsfield. But the success is not personal merely or his alone. He is but the signal type, the prerogative instance of the completeness of the conquest by which the Jewish captivity, like captive Greece, has taken captive its fierce victor. Lord Beaconsfield has been in his way, not less than his Alroy, a Prince of the Captivity, and to have become Prime Minister of England, even at the cost of quitting the faith of his fathers, is not a less achievement than, like his hero, to have become caliph.

In literature, Lord Beaconsfield has been essentially a Jewish apologist; Josephus and the false Aristobulus simply anticipated his method, or rather he applied theirs with a difference. They set themselves to prove to an indifferent and laughing Gentile world that the philosophy and morals of the Greek and Roman poets and sages were derived from the Hebrew Scriptures; and perpetrated not a few forgeries to make good their point. Lord Beaconsfield has with more boldness claimed as of Jewish race nearly all the most distinguished men of science and art, of thought and action, whom modern Europe has produced, and in doing so has been genealogically a rather credulous Apella. He has pleaded the cause of his race and original faith with one great advantage. He has done so as an ostensible convert to Christianity. But he is essentially, if we may use a distinction as old as the religion itself, a Hebrew and not a Gentile Christian. His view of the religion is perhaps rather peculiar in our day, whatever it may have been two thousand years ago. He apparently regards it as a kind of second part or continuation of Judaism, bearing the same sort of relation to it of affiliation and of inferiority as that which the second part of Faust

sustains to the first; or which Paradise Regained has to Paradise Lost. The work is genuine; it is, perhaps, a necessary supplement to its predecessor and recompletion of it, but showing signs of the old age and the declining powers of the race from whose religious genius it has sprung. Of course, Lord Beaconsfield does not say as much as this. He does not even insinuate it. Nevertheless, an impression such as that we have conveyed is distinctly produced. If we may trust statements commonly made, Lord Beaconsfield owes in the main to accident his opportunity of pleading, in the character of a professor of the second part of the Jewish religion, on behalf of the social and personal claims and the civil rights of those of his race who accept only the first. Through a personal quarrel Isaac Disraeli broke off relations with the synagogue without entering into any relations with the Church. It is said that the Church of England is indebted to the good nature of that heathen money-changer and verse-maker, Samuel Rogers, for the presence of Lord Beaconsfield among its faithful sons. Rogers did not kidnap the young Benjamin Disraeli as the young Mortara was kidnapped. He was not consumed by any zeal for souls. Thinking

it hard that an empty form should stand in the way of a clever boy's prospects, Rogers it is said, we do not know with what truth, took him off to St. Andrew's Church, Holborn. There it is certain that on 31st of July, 1817, Benjamin Disraeli, "said to be about twelve years of age," as the baptismal register records, was made perhaps as much of a Christian as he ever became. Whatever the instrumentality employed, Benjamin Disraeli became a member of the Church of England in the year 1817, and as such entered upon all the privileges, civil and political, which were still denied not only to Jews and unbelievers but to Papists and dissenters.

The discipline of a private academy, and, it is said, of a solicitor's office, were substituted in his case for that of the public school and the university. Whatever the loss to him may have been morally and socially, Lord Beaconsfield has never been deficient in those intellectual attainments which it is common to connect with university training—too exclusively, as the names of Mill and Grote have sufficiently shown even to a British House of Commons. It is perhaps to be regretted that what seems a premature mannishness should have thrust young Disraeli into

the world of action and of authorship, when he would have been more naturally and profitably under the discipline of pupilage and spurred by the emulation and friendships of college life. A certain self-enclosure and isolation to which he has been prone through life might have been in some degree combated, if Lord Beaconsfield had ever been a boy among boys or a young man among young men. Silence and the concentrated self-absorption, which save at rare moments have marked him in Parliament and in general society, might have given way if more genial influences in early manhood had followed upon the unhappy experience to which his race and religion subjected his childhood. It would probably be a mistake to read the more remarkable of his earlier novels, Vivian Grey and Contarini Fleming, as directly and designedly autobiographic. If the author had been consciously drawing his own portrait in either, the lineaments would almost certainly have been more pleasing. The tone of mockery and burlesque with which the young heroes comment on their own proceedings would have been spared. It is quite obvious that the author of Vivian Grey and Contarini Fleming regards those young gentlemen as very often

a pair of intolerably conceited and unamiable jackanapes, who would have been the better for a chastening. Unconsciously, however, the ideas over which the author's mind was brooding, ideas springing out of his own position in society and his relations to life, constantly appear. A very young writer who has had very little experience of mankind and the world, describes himself without knowing it because he has nothing else to describe. Vivian Grey's lament: "If I were the son of a millionaire or a noble, I might have all. Curse on my lot! that the want of a few rascal counters, the possession of a little rascal blood, should mar my fortune," is very likely, with the patriotic change of a single word, to have been on the lips of the younger Disraeli. In the preface to Contarini Fleming, again, the author sets forth one of the aims which he had in writing. He "endeavoured," he says, "to conceive a character whose position in life should be at variance and, as it were, in constant conflict with his temperament. . . . The combination that connected in one being Scandinavia and the South, and made the image of a distant and most romantic city continually act upon a nervous temperament sur-

rounded by the snows and forests of the north, though novel, it is believed, in literature, was by no means an impossible or even an improbable one." If we substitute the mist and rain of England for the snows and forests of Scandinavia, and conceive the image of Jerusalem as well as that of Venice constantly present to the mind of the exile, we have a combination not only possible in literature but actual in the author's own experience. Contarini Fleming grew out of a pilgrimage to the East and to Jerusalem, which took in Spain and Venice and all the ancestral lands through which the author's race and house had passed during the long wanderings of their exile. The feeling which animates the passage we have quoted from the preface of Contarini Fleming, finds constant expression all through the work. There is very likely no conscious personal identification of the author and the hero; but the pervading sentiment is for that all the deeper. "Some exemption," Contarini hopes, "from the sectarian prejudices which embitter life may be surely expected from one who, by a curious combination of circumstances, finds himself without country, without kindred, and without friends. Wherever I moved I looked around me and

beheld a race different from myself. There was no sympathy between my frame and the rigid climate whither I had been brought to live." "Their blue eyes, their flaxen hair and their white visages claimed no kith and kindred with my Venetian countenance." Again Contarini declaims against "the vast quantity of dull, lowering, entangling ties that formed the great domestic mesh, and bound me to a country which I detested, covered me with a climate which killed me, surrounded me with manners with which I could not sympathize." In Vivian Grey and Contarini Fleming the two barriers which stood in the way of political ambition are presented separately. In a plutocratic aristocracy a poor plebeian laments his possession of rascal blood, or blood more damaging than that of rascaldom, and his lack of rascal counters. In Scandinavia the hero meets the obstacle of foreign race and uncongenial temperament. The foreign adventurers who have been able to overcome difficulties such as these are the object of Contarini Fleming's most constant and earnest admiration. Alberoni and Ripperda are statesmen for whom something like enthusiasm is expressed. Lord Beaconsfield has been more lucky or more dexterous than either of

these political fortune-hunters, between the latter of whom and himself there is a certain resemblance, especially in the theological speculations with which they have amused their leisure.

A character and a mind formed in the domestic and social circumstances out of which the stories of Vivian Grey and Contarini Fleming naturally came, and which they expressed with a faithfulness all the greater for being undesigned, needed above all others the discipline of an English home, and would have been the better for the equal companionship of the public school and the university. By no one of these roots was Lord Beaconsfield fixed in British soil. He may be compared rather to one of those air-plants which draw their nourishment and take their color from the atmosphere which surrounds them, and in which they float, but which lay no hold of the solid earth. Vivian Grey and Contarini Fleming were written at some interval of time, the former appearing in 1826, the latter in 1831. There is, however, a certain natural connection between the two in the unwitting disclosure of their author's purpose and character which they contain. They reveal to us the aims and feelings with which their author entered

upon the political career which we propose to review, and of which they are the preface. It is impossible to understand Lord Beaconsfield without them. It may not be possible quite to understand him with them. But neither the books nor the man can be comprehended or judged with due indulgence apart from each other. To the same literary period belong The Young Duke, Alroy, and The Revolutionary Epic. All these works seem to have been produced not because the writer was full of some theme or conception which claimed expression, but because he was a candidate for personal distinction, and was resolved to obtain it by one means or another. The Revolutionary Epic is suggested by the reflection that Homer having produced the heroïc epic, and Virgil the political epic, Dante the national epic, and Milton the religious epic, for Disraeli the Younger there remained the revolutionary epic. In the event of the public failing to recognise, and to be quick about it, the poetic heir of Homer, Virgil, Dante, and Milton, the inspired poet pledged himself "without a pang to hurl his Lyre to Limbo," both of which words begin most fortunately and expressively with L. He had no desire to sing to a world which was

as the deaf adder to the charmer. Repeating a remark which he had formerly put into the mouths of Vivian Grey and Contarini Fleming, "I am not," he says, "one of those who find consolation for the neglect of my contemporaries in the imaginary plaudits of a more sympathetic posterity." With Lord Beaconsfield it is all a question of applause. The title-page of the Revolutionary Epic sets forth in monumental style that it is "the work of Disraeli the Younger, author of the Psychological Romance," a species of composition of which Disraeli the Younger seems to have supposed that he was the inventor in Contarini Fleming. In that work he had set forth a doctrine of poetical expression which seems afterwards to have commended itself to Mr. Carlyle. Lord Beaconsfield holds, or then held, that the metrical form of poetry is due to the fact that it was at first composed to be sung to the lyre, and that the artifices of diction and the barbaric clash of rhyme are ill adapted to an age in which reading has taken the place of recitation.

The Wonderful Tale of Alroy, which, however, does not want its artifices of diction, and its occasional clash of rhyme, was composed in its more im-

passioned portions on this principle. Disraeli the Younger was essentially an inventor and projector in literature. The craving for fame prompted one extravagant design after another. Expressed in the plainest terms, and urged with a reiteration which even the author's liveliness does not always rescue from tediousness in his early writings, Vivian Grey and Contarini Fleming have no other aim in life than to be notorious and powerful, chiefly by duping or terrifying others. Contarini had a deep conviction that life would be intolerable unless he were the greatest of men. The desire of distinction and of astounding action raged in his infantile soul. Nor does he care to win by fair means. His description of a schoolboy fight and of his demeanour in it is prophetic of the spirit in which the writer's political gladiatorship has been conducted. It is the author of the Letters of Runnymede and the assailant of Sir Robert Peel who writes of this schoolboy struggle: "I would not have waited for their silly rules of mock-combat, but have destroyed him in his prostration." A similar indifference to the rules of the ring and to fair hitting has frequently been observable in Lord Beaconsfield's political encounters. Fame is

essential to Contarini, though not posthumous fame. Whether it is to be won as a brigand or as a warrior, as a prime minister or as a revolutionary leader, as a diplomatist or as a conspirator, is a matter of only secondary moment. That may be as time and chance shall determine. The great thing is to wield authority conspicuously and magnificently, to be feared and to be envied. That this power is to be used for the good of others never for one moment occurs to the heroes of Lord Beaconsfield's early novels. It may be said that he is simply describing the wild notions and dreams with which the brains of boys swarm, while they are still in the merely predatory and animal stage which precedes the civilised and human one, in the development of individual character as well as of nature and society. We are quite ready to make such allowance as this consideration requires. But Lord Beaconsfield's heroes never pass into a further stage. There is no sign that he recognises one. It is quite easy to see the explanation of this shortcoming. The bonds of country and of class have from the very nature of the case scarcely existed for Lord Beaconsfield. The non-personal elements which bind most men by a thousand ties to

the community of which they are members, and to the lesser communities, local or of organized sentiment and opinion, into which every nation is divided, have been for him as if they were not. The circumstances of his birth, the legislation and social temper of the country to which his ancestry transferred themselves a century and a quarter since, the inherited qualities of a race whose habits of mind and character have been formed by nearly two thousand years of persecution and social slight, have hindered Lord Beaconsfield from cultivating that subordination of mere personal greed, whether of fame, or wealth, or power, to the well-being of a sect, a party, a class, a nation, without which a genuine community is impossible. In this moral banishment the social and even human element in man is suppressed, or grows up but feebly from its root in what is individual, self-seeking and animal. The one apparent exception in Lord Beaconsfield's case is, when properly viewed, simply an illustration of the general rule. He has been true to the Jewish people who are really his country and church. He has quitted them in semblance, but in so doing he has helped them, to plead for them the more effectually. For the rest a certain

fidelity, as of a Swiss mercenary to the chief or party in whose service he has enlisted, belongs to him conspicuously.

It is scarcely Lord Beaconsfield's fault, all things considered, that his career has not been in its main features that of an English statesman, but rather that of a foreign political adventurer. An unfair standard is applied to it when it is judged by the tests by which we try politicians of English blood and training. The Philippe Daims, the Alberonis, the Ripperdas of countries and times different and remote from our own, are the politicians with whom at least during a great part of his public life he may most naturally and fairly be compared. Among political adventurers, admitting the lawfulness of the calling, he holds an intellectually conspicuous, and even by comparison a morally respectable place. The hatred of the Whig oligarchy which runs through the Letters of Runnymede, and which has inspired many a gibe and scoff from Lord Beaconsfield's lips and pen during half a century, is probably as genuine a sentiment as either he or any one else has ever entertained. It springs from the same root as his admiration of Bolingbroke. A personal rule, the monarchy of a patriot

king holding himself above the strife of party, and therefore beyond its control, gives the adventurer and the favourite opportunities which it is not easy to find under any other system. It opens doors which an oligarchy, Venetian or Whig, tries to keep closed. Lord Beaconsfield has not only defended Bolingbroke's doctrines in his Letters to a Noble and Learned Lord in Vindication of the English Constitution, and elsewhere, but he has striven in later years to give effect to them. He has done so, it is true, by the instrumentality of that very system of government by party, which in his more candid moments he decries, and of that aristocratic class for which he every now and then intimates a sort of good-natured contempt. Circumstances made Lord Beaconsfield a political soldier of fortune. In the reign of Queen Anne he would probably have been the pamphleteer of a faction. Under George III. he would have been the dependant and parliamentary spokesman of a great noble, as Barré was of Lord Shelburne, whom Lord Beaconsfield admires only less than he admires Bolingbroke, and in part for the same reasons. Under the reign of Queen Victoria he has passed through both these embryc

stages, as is the law with fully developed animals. He has been the pamphleteer of a party, and the parliamentary spokesman of aristocratic chiefs. He was the Barré of Lord George Bentinck and of Lord Derby. But he has brought the art of political adventure to a higher point than it has reached in England since the full development of parliamentary institutions. Probably two things were needed for this perfect and final success. The formation under the personal and hereditary influences which we have endeavoured to trace of a typical adventurer was one of these conditions. The reign of a female sovereign was the other. It was Queen Anne who made Bolingbroke possible. Queen Victoria has been as essential to Lord Beaconsfield. The faint parody of Bolingbroke's career and doctrine which Lord Beaconsfield has been able to exhibit has required a state of things resembling, though but distantly, that which prevailed under the latest preceding Queen Regnant.

II.

From 1826 to 1837.

In the preceding pages we have spoken of the race and parentage of Lord Beaconsfield. To some minds it seems impossible that you can say that a man is a Jew without intending to reproach him for being a Jew. Unfortunately, the strength of still-surviving prejudices makes this confusion only too natural; and the imputation of an ungenerous appeal to hatreds of creed and race cannot be avoided by any writer who discusses the character of the present Prime Minister. If Lord Beaconsfield's political adventures could be truly narrated without any reference to his Jewish blood and to the inherited qualities which are deeply stamped upon his nature, physical and moral, we should be very glad to keep the things apart. But the blood is the life, in another sense than that which the Hebrew law-giver attached to the phrase; and the secret of Lord Beaconsfield's life lies in his Jewish blood. It is not a matter for

self-glorification, though it seems to be so to him; it is not a matter for disparagement and contempt, though both his assailants and eulogists often appear to regard it as such. It is a simple question of fact and of natural history. So with the characteristics which two thousand years of persecution and suffering have impressed upon the Jewish Captivity in Europe. If Israel was not the worse for what it had undergone, cruelty and wrong-doing would be merely physical calamities. If a man loses half his worth on the day on which he becomes a slave, the nation which has been in servitude for two thousand years is not likely to be morally the better for the experience. That the Jews have imbibed servile vices in nineteen centuries of bondage is as obvious in fact as it was certain in theory. That freedom will bring to them the virtues of freemen we do not doubt; at present it has stopped at a period of transition, and has brought them the equivocal qualities of freedmen. Their persons have been enfranchised, but not their minds. They display too often the habits of a manumitted slave. It is not matter for wonder that Epictetus should be a rarer product of slavery than Narcissus. The Venetian is almost as conspicuous in

Lord Beaconsfield as the Jew. The organization is due to his race. The environment of several centuries, acting upon the organization, has been supplied by the republic of St. Mark. Lord Beaconsfield has always discussed English politics in terms of the Venetian state-system. To him the British aristocracy are Venetian magnificoes; the sovereign is a doge whom an oligarchy has enslaved. George III. was a sort of Marino Faliero who struggled against the bondage by which an usurping oligarchy fettered him; and in the struggle, which has Lord Beaconsfield's intense sympathy, forfeited not his life but his reason.

Lord Beaconsfield's manhood began in the days of George IV.; and the preparatory part of his career, his apprenticeship in literature and politics, extends over the last four years of the life of that sovereign and over the whole of the reign of William IV. His parliamentary life, which in England is the only form of political life, opens with the Parliament which was assembled on the accession of the Queen. The circumstances of the time, the men who occupied conspicuous positions in the State, and the evi-

dent transition which was impending from an old to a new era, were such as would have roused the ardour of a generous and humane mind. The long Tory domination, which had been marked by the selfish foreign policy of Castlereagh and the domestic oppression of Sidmouth, by political prosecutions and Peterloo massacres, was obviously drawing to a close. Huskisson had begun that policy of Free Trade which twenty years later was to receive its full development at the hands of Peel; the political emancipation of Nonconformists and of Roman Catholics was obviously at hand, and formed the subjects of ardent strife; Parliamentary Reform threatened a revolution in the near future. It was an era of great causes and struggling principles, which powerfully appealed to all minds in which the love of freedom and the sense of justice were strong, and in which there was any consciousness of power to aid the right cause and to combat the wrong. The young Disraeli, a politician in his schoolboy days, felt no summons to the field. The history of his own race did not bid him sympathize with those who suffered from kindred oppression. The dreadful distress among the poor did not win from him any cry

of indignation nor stir him to any efforts for its mitigation or removal. The successive Liberal administrations of Lord Grey and Lord Melbourne, with many weaknesses and follies, and much slothful inaction, yet unloosed one heavy burden after another from the necks of the English people, and opened one closed pathway after another to the energies and talents hitherto denied their free scope. Lord Beaconsfield, in the days which ought to have been those of youthful enthusiasm, gave no help to the work. He watched it closely; he stood by and railed at those who were doing it, striving by scoff and jeer to discredit them. If he did not hinder it, it was for lack of power and not for lack of will. The presence of Canning and Huskisson in the Cabinet of Lord Liverpool was a sign that the era in which it had been possible for Burke to be the political dependent of a Marquis of Rockingham and a Duke of Portland, was passing away; and the Premiership of Canning confirmed the augury. Yet when Canning was persecuted to his death and Huskisson was driven from office, no word of rebuke or indignation rose to the lips of the young candidate for fame. To him, at a period when every ingenuous and sincere

mind was stirred to noble thoughts and strenuous action, politics and politicians were simply the theme of literary satire or a field for personal intrigue and adventure. At a time when in literature the meditations of Wordsworth and the speculations of Coleridge, the hardy realism of Crabbe, the mystic dreams of Shelley, the generous enthusiasm of Byron in his better moods, and the manly historic sense of Scott, had breathed a new and healthier soul into English imagination, the young Disraeli felt no contagious inspiration of nobleness, and took his place among the novelists of high life and of political society, with Theodore Hook and the author of Tremaine, with Mrs. Gore and Lady Blessington. A free and generous spirit would have raised itself above the degrading influences of a servile condition and ancestry. Lord Beaconsfield, in his boyhood, as in his manhood and old age, was content now to flatter, now to mock and gibe, to be now the parasite and now the bravo of the great, to write now a begging and now a threatening letter. The ten years which preceded his entrance into parliament contained the promise which has been fulfilled in the forty years of his parliamentary life.

Lord Beaconsfield's first adventure was literary rather than political; but it was literature with a large element of politics in it. Vivian Grey, or rather the first part of it, which is alone much remembered now, appeared in 1826, when the author was just of age. It was written probably in his latest boyhood. Lord Beaconsfield affects now to be ashamed of the work, which he says that he has vainly endeavoured to suppress. He speaks of it as a puerile production; but it really does not differ morally or intellectually from most of his other novels. The survival of boyishness in Lothair and the premature mannishness of Vivian Grey bring both stories to about the same level. Apart from the contemporary allusions with which each work is filled, Vivian Grey might have been the child of Lord Beaconsfield's old age and Lothair the indiscretion of his youth. The work of the sexagenarian lacks ripeness and maturity; the work of the boy has no tinge of ingenuousness. It lacks the hue of virtue. Rather the advantage is in this respect with the more recent work, which has not the unabashed hardihood of the earlier. In Vivian Grey, however, the key-note of Lord Beaconsfield's career is struck. We need not

tell the story which is familiar to every one. The type of character is that of the adventurer bent upon climbing by whatever means to the highest point of ambition. He fails, and there is a good deal of virtuous moralising about his crimes and faults. In Vivian Grey, as in Contarini Fleming—the person, we mean, and not the novel—there is a curious blending of Beaumarchais and of Byron. The slippery adventurer, who is not much above the moral or intellectual level of the intriguing slave and valet of the classical and French comedy, is mixed up with the grand passions, the crime, and the remorse of Lara and the Corsair; and the combination is not a little ridiculous. But the basis of the character is the impudent schemer.

The story, as we have said, or rather its first part, was published in 1826, and it bears some traces of the time of its production. Lord Liverpool was Prime Minister, and when the second part of Vivian Grey appeared, he had been succeeded by Mr. Canning, of whom, and of Brougham, and Lord Eldon, there are perhaps traces in Mr. Charlatan Gas, Mr. Foaming Fudge, and Lord Past Century, though we have the names only and not the men. Who Mr.

Stapyltan Toad and Mr. Liberal Snake may have been, it is not worth while to inquire. Sir Christopher Mowbray, who, on Liberal Snake's "presuming to inform him what rent was, damned himself several times from sheer astonishment at the impudence of the fellow," and whose "most peculiar characteristic was an inexplicable habit of styling political economists French smugglers," is perhaps the liveliest sketch in the book. Sir Christopher, we are told, "is perfectly aware of the present perilous state of the country, and watches with the greatest interest all the plots and plans of this enlightened age. The only thing which he does not exactly comprehend is the London University. This affair really puzzles the worthy gentleman, who could as easily fancy a county member not being a freeholder, as a university not being at Oxford or Cambridge. Indeed, to this hour, the old gentleman believes that the whole business is a hoax, and if you tell him that . . . . there are actually four acres of very valuable land purchased near White Conduit Street for the erection . . . . the old gentleman looks up to heaven, as if determined not to be taken in, and leaning back in his chair, sends forth a sceptical and smiling, 'No!

no! no! that won't do.'" In Sir Christopher Mowbray damning French wines, Bible Societies, and Mr. Huskisson, surrounded by lecturing political economists, and incredulous of the London University; in the inarticulate man of science, Mr. Macaw, who is contrasted with "the mealy-mouthed professors of the Royal Institution, who get patronised by the blues—the Lavoisiers of May Fair," a sneer we take it at Sir Humphry Davy or Faraday; in Mr. Stapyltan Toad's pamphlet on the Corn Laws, "which excited the dire indignation of the Political Economy Club"—the commencement of what we may call the Brougham period of politics may be noted. The schoolmaster began to get abroad, and men talked about the popularisation of science and the diffusion of useful knowledge. The movement which may be supposed to have its personification in the contest between Lord Past Century and Mr. Liberal Principles had its weak and even its ludicrous side. Vivian Grey cannot be said to give a full picture of it in its earliest stage; still there are in the book glimpses of it, drawn in a sketchy and scratchy manner, but showing a conception of its real character.

To Lord Beaconsfield, as a boy, the situation on

its literary side seems simply to have offered him opportunities as a satirist, and if he had made a literary career his own, this mode of treating the society of his time would not have been fairly open to severe censure. There are men to whom the cynical view of human life is natural, as there are others to whom life presents itself simply in its artistic aspects. The indifference of Goethe to the great struggles of his age showed a constitutional defect of character; and the mocking temper which is always conspicuous in Vivian Grey, and is unabated in Lothair, is not an amiable feature of youth or of old age. If Lord Beaconsfield had been content to play the part of a gibing chorus to the drama passing under his eyes, it would have been matter for regret that he should have seen only one aspect of the human and English life of his time; but that too ought to be seen, and it can be seen through his eyes. For other phases of we must trust to the perceptions of other intellects and characters. The real ignobleness which is impressed on Lord Beaconsfield's writings and political life lies in this, that while men with any greatness of character withdraw from the pursuits and associations for which they feel a contempt, Lord Beaconsfield has

been impelled into them in spite of, or even by, this very scorn. The meannesses and weaknesses which he ridiculed he felt could turn to the account of his own ambition. The satirist was also an adventurer.

His early manhood was the beginning of a period which seemed to promise a new epoch. The Cabinet of Lord Liverpool in 1826, when in Vivian Grey Lord Beaconsfield took his first survey of English society and politics, contained two men of genius on whom the hatred of aristocratic dulness and monopoly had conferred the name of adventurers. Mr. Canning and Mr. Huskisson had fought their way from difficult and inconsiderable beginnings to high places in the service of the State. Surrounded by heavy peers and squires, in a Ministry presided over by the very genius of decorous respectability, their political fortunes may have helped to fire the ambition of the younger Disraeli, who perhaps saw a Marquis of Carabas in Lord Liverpool and a Vivian Grey in Mr. Canning. But though Canning and Huskisson, and before them Burke, were stigmatized as adventurers, and although in a certain sense the name belongs to them, they cannot be brought into the same class with Lord Beaconsfield. With a truer self-respect,

Burke perhaps would not have been content to serve great nobles, and to be rewarded in his earlier years with a private secretaryship under Lord Rockingham, and in his maturer manhood with an office outside the Cabinet into which Charles Fox, while yet a youth, was admitted. Something of the servility which the prevalence of an aristocratic system produces even in genius and worth, is apparent in his submission. But Burke's too humble attitude was redeemed by passionate political convictions and by devoted personal attachments. He served these in serving his great Whig patrons. Canning never failed in his enthusiasm for Pitt and in his steady friendship with Jenkinson; and Huskisson's consistency as an economic statesman was born of unwavering conviction. These men were adventurers in politics only in the sense in which the man who, not being born in the purple, wins his way to fortune is an adventurer; or as the founder, by genius and enterprise, of a great commercial house, which he has raised from low beginnings or from nothing, is an adventurer, when he is compared with the inheritor of a business that has dealings with all the world. In the sense in which the word carries moral odium with it, as implying indifference to per-

sons and principles, it is not applicable to them. This is the sense in which it is used when it is injuriously applied to Lord Beaconsfield; and this use of the term, we fear, his career too conclusively justifies. In his interpretation of the motives of the great man whose unworn title he has audaciously borrowed, Lord Beaconsfield throws a strong light upon his own aims. He thinks that Burke's passionate denunciation of the French Revolution was simply a vehicle for his exploding hatred of the Whigs whom he had served for hire, and who had kept his wages from him. When Fox was admitted to the Cabinet, from which he was excluded, "hard necessity," says Lord Beaconsfield, "made Mr. Burke submit to the yoke, but the humiliation could never be forgotten. Pouring forth the vials of his hoarded vengeance . . . . he dashed to the ground the rival who had robbed him of his hard-earned greatness," and "rent in twain the oligarchy that had dared to use and to insult him." We quote from Sybil, one of the novels of Lord Beaconsfield's maturer manhood. Lord Beaconsfield reads his own political spite and malice into the majestic though disordered movements of Burke's genius. He attributes to him the anger of a discarded and

slighted servant. He fancies that the author of the Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs was animated by the neo-Judaic hatred of a Venetian oligarchy.

The second part of Vivian Grey, which only survives in a dead-alive union with the first, is a sort of prose Childe Harold. The penitent wanderings of the discomforted adventurer have picturesque and amusing passages; but the political allusions are few. Lord Beaconsfield has himself imitated in later years the policy of the plebeian minister of the Grand Duke of Reisenburg, who took care to distribute offices among great nobles, so that, having no family influence of his own, he might organize the family influence of others. In this, says the author of Vivian Grey, "he resembles the Prime Minister of a neighbouring state, whose private secretary is unable to write a sentence, almost to direct a letter, but he is a noble." Mr. Canning was then Prime Minister of England, and Lord George Bentinck was, we believe, his private secretary.

In 1828 Lord Beaconsfield published the Adventures of Captain Popanilla. One of the most remarkable things about this work is the fact that the author has forgotten that he ever wrote it. In the

general preface prefixed to one of the later editions of Lothair, Lord Beaconsfield speaks of Contarini Fleming as his second work. It was really, at the very least, his fourth,—Popanilla and the Young Duke, a three-volume novel, coming between it and Vivian Grey. Lord Beaconsfield appears to labour under the curious notion that by suppressing a passage or a book he makes it never to have been, and becomes justified in asserting that no such thing was ever written. When in 1864 a question was raised as to the tyrannicidal doctrines attributed to Mazzini, and the complicity of a subordinate member of Lord Palmerston's Government in the enterprises of the great Italian revolutionist, Lord Beaconsfield was virtuously indignant, and did not rest until the offending member had been cut off. In the meantime some curious busybody—perhaps the person who afterwards traced a celebrated eulogy on the Duke of Wellington to M. Thiers,—got hold of a copy of the Revolutionary Epick, and quoted thence some lines which justified tyrannicide as explicitly as Mazzini was supposed to have done. To clear himself from this accusation, and to enable the public to judge between him and his calumniators, Lord Bea-

consfield promptly republished the poem, leaving out the lines impugned. More recently he has adopted a still more thorough procedure. In the preface of which we have spoken, he intimates that between 1832 and 1837 he wrote nothing at all. "There was yet a barren interval of five years of my life, so far as literature is concerned." The Revolutionary Epick, which was published in 1834, is thus got rid of in the most effectual manner. This is hurling his lyre to limbo with a vengeance. "I'll disown you, I'll disinherit you, I'll unget you," says Sir Anthony Absolute to his son. Lord Beaconsfield apparently thinks that by disowning he can unwrite such of his works as he no longer finds it agreeable to acknowledge. He can not only make them cease to be, but cause them never to have been. But this is a feat which it is proverbially beyond the power of omnipotence to accomplish—*factum infectum facere nequit.* Since he achieved respectability, Lord Beaconsfield has thought it necessary to affect a certain degree of penitence for having written Vivian Grey. He emulates the contrition of Chaucer and Dryden. Such, he represents, was his sense of the demerits of the work, that when his second novel was published, he

did not describe himself as the author of that story. The fact is that Popanilla, which was published in 1828; the Young Duke, which was published in 1831; Alroy, which was published in 1833; and Venetia, which was published in 1837, were all described on the title-pages as by "the author of Vivian Grey." They were recommended to the public by that fact. Contarini Fleming, which, as we have said, was neither the second nor the third, but the fourth of Lord Beaconsfield's works, is the only one on the title-page of which Vivian Grey is not mentioned. This work, afterwards called a "psychological romance," was originally announced as a "psychological autobiography." There was therefore an obvious propriety in veiling its real authorship. Lord Beaconsfield, however, having persuaded himself that Vivian Grey was repented of as soon as written, proceeds to make a series of circumstantial statements in corroboration of that fact. The origin and growth of myths is thus pleasingly illustrated in an example to which historic inquirers ought to attach some value. A fixed idea generates a detailed narrative to support and confirm it. The idea gives credit to the narrative, and the narrative supports the

idea, and yet both are fiction. It is interesting to observe the processes which have created religions in operation before our very eyes. A myth, it should be observed, does not involve conscious falsehood, but only a creative imagination embodying its conceptions in narratives, and straightway believing the narrative because it embodies its conceptions.

There are, of course, reasons why Lord Beaconsfield should be desirous of ignoring Popanilla and the Revolutionary Epick, and should regret that Vivian Grey's tenacity of life has resisted all attempts to smother it. Popanilla does not respect the foundations of society, and there are passages in it which the future leader of the Protectionist party might be excused for wishing to deal with, as the assailant of Mazzini and Mr. Stansfeld dealt with the tyrannicidal preachments of the Revolutionary Epick. It is impossible to avoid some association of Popanilla with its author. The shipwrecked adventurer, brought from the island of Fantaisie to the coast of Vraibleusia, and mingling with the crowds in the streets of Hubbabub, was not more foreign to the scenes and people among whom he found himself, than the younger Disraeli in the politics and society

of London. The description of the statue, of the aboriginal inhabitants, and of the twelve managers, in which the sovereign, the landed aristocracy, and the Cabinet were ridiculed, is perhaps the cleverest portion of Popanilla. In the arrangements which the aboriginal inhabitant makes for forcing his own agricultural produce on the inhabitants of Vraibleusia, the doctrine and practice of protection to native industry is openly ridiculed. It is clear that at this turn of his life he was fully possessed of the arguments in favour of Free Trade, and understood them more clearly than might have been expected. His eulogies in other works on the economic doctrines which Shelburne and the younger Pitt derived from Adam Smith, show that until political exigencies made the advocacy of protection expedient, Lord Beaconsfield was a free-trader. His phrases vary as occasion suggests, but his general doctrine is unmistakeable. The story is a clever boyish parody and imitation, which shows enough acquaintance with the terms of the political, philosophical, and religious fashions of the time to enable the author to make fun of them. Lord Beaconsfield has never thought it necessary to go much deeper into matters than phrases and catch-

words will lead him. Mankind, in his view, is governed by phrases and catchwords, and to study thoroughly what you do not intend to treat thoroughly would be a waste of time. Lord Beaconsfield has never treated either his subjects or the public seriously, and the public has been content to laugh at and with him until the present moment, when it may begin to think itself of the crackling of thorns under the pot.

In such exercises as these, and in the travels in Europe and the East to which we have referred, Lord Beaconsfield prepared himself for that public life in which he was anxious to play a conspicuous part. In the preface to Lothair, of which we have before spoken, he lays claim to a sort of political consistency. He represents himself as having through life avowed certain principles, which were the result of early study and meditation. "Born in a library and trained from early childhood by learned men who did not share the passions and prejudices of our political and social life, I had imbibed on some subjects conclusions different from those which generally prevail, and especially with reference to the history of our own country." Lord Beaconsfield then proceeds to

set forth, in language suitable to a man who had been, and hoped to be again, Prime Minister of England, and who was still leader of the Conservative party, some ghostly shadow of the old doctrines about the Doge and the Venetian oligarchy, though those familiar names are never mentioned. He was not, however, so exclusively the recluse student working out his own solitary conclusions in his natal library and among the learned men who trained his early childhood, as might be fancied from the description. The discipline of a dissenting boarding-school and the bustle of an attorney's office had their share with the learned men who were free from the passions and prejudices of our political and social life, in the formation of the young Disraeli's mind and character. Familiarity with these passions and prejudices, whersoever derived, is more conspicuous in Vivian Grey, Popanilla, and the Young Duke than new readings of English history and theories of the English constitution. These appear later in Lord Beaconsfield's life and writings. The library and the learned men have probably had very little to do with them, except in furnishing an imposing and half-barbarous jargon of magnificoes and doges, in which the new doctrines

were expressed for the greater bewilderment of the public, prepared to take *omne ignotum pro magnifico*. Lord Beaconsfield's view of the British Constitution at the commencement of his political adventures may be briefly expressed. It was a view from the outside. Its high walls and closed doors and barred windows were the objects presented to his gaze, and he resolved to surmount them. In a man who has a high conception of politics, and who is eager to level unjust barriers that stand in the way of others as well as himself, attack upon oligarchic monopoly and privilege may be commended as a noble and generous enterprise. To Lord Beaconsfield, however, by his repeated confession, and still more emphatically by the clear tenor of his life and writings, politics have been simply an exciting game in which he desired to take part, and politicians have formed an exclusive society into which he was resolved to force himself. The exclusion which he resented was the exclusion of himself.

There has been much discussion as to whether Lord Beaconsfield made his first appearance in politics as a Tory, or as a Radical, or as a Tory-Radical. The fact is that he was an anti-Whig, and his Tory-

ism, or Radicalism, or Tory-Radicalism, were only so many phases of his opposition to the Whigs and their oligarchical *beati possidentes*. We need not go into the details of Lord Beaconsfield's candidature for High Wycombe, and his unsuccessful overtures to other constituencies, until his election for Maidstone in 1837. The story has been sufficiently told in Mr. Macknight's able biography, and is repeated with more detail in the carefully compiled volume entitled, "Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield." He stood twice in 1832 for the first-named borough; issued, in hope of a vacancy which did not occur, an address to the electors of Marylebone in 1833; and stood unsuccessfully against the late Mr. Labouchere for Taunton in 1835. In the latter year he first appeared distinctly as a Conservative. Up till then he had hovered between Toryism and Radicalism, advocating the measures proposed by Mr. Hume and Mr. O'Connell on grounds drawn from the writings and the conduct of Bolingbroke and Sir William Wyndham, who were in favour of triennial parliaments, and who, for good reasons, had certainly never said anything against vote by ballot or the repeal of the taxes on knowledge. In 1834 Lord Beaconsfield appears

to have been still hesitating between the two elements of his Tory-Radicalism. According to a passage in the late Mr. Greville's diary, he was undecided whether to seek his Marquis of Carabas in Lord Chandos or in Lord Durham. One thing only is clear. Lord Beaconsfield was bent on a political career, and found that the exclusiveness of the Whig oligarchy was the main obstacle in his way. His hatred of the Whigs was, we believe, genuine, and it dressed itself up in the guise of a principle. Political adventurers who are not content to be the mere servants and lackeys of a great lord, have usually played either one or other of two games. They may be courtiers or they may be demagogues ; they may flatter the mob, or they may be the sycophants of the Crown. They sometimes play these parts in succession, as Wilkes did. They have not often combined them at one and the same time. This, however, is what Lord Beaconsfield has done. The Crown and the multitude are set forth as natural allies against a rapacious, recreant, and haughty parliament. The Reform Act is described as issuing out of "the popular frenzy of a mean and selfish revolution, which emancipated neither the Crown nor the people."

The cause for which Hampden died in the field and Sydney on the scaffold was the cause of the Venetian republic. From the very beginning of his career, Lord Beaconsfield has doubled the apparently inconsistent parts of king's friend and mobsman. Under different conditions, and with a different ultimate object, he has played the same game in England as Louis Napoleon played in France. It is singular, however, that his political detestation of the aristocracy has been accompanied by an enormous social veneration of them. As a novelist, he is never easy when he is in any other society. His veneration, it is true, is mainly for their houses, their furniture, their grounds, and their liveries. His novels abound in descriptions of the mansions and parks of great people, all done in the style of a great auctioneer's advertisements. The tone and phrases of the house-furnisher, the appraiser, and the salesman run through all the still life of his novels. A tailor matching patterns, unrolling his sample-book, and combining a sweet thing in waistcoats with an article he can recommend for trousers, is the image which Lord Beaconsfield's inventory of the dresses of his heroes recalls. To him the Emperor Hadrian is almost at the

head of mankind as being "the most sumptuous character of antiquity." A love of power, wealth, and finery, and a mixed hatred and reverence of the persons who possess them, is the common inspiration of Lord Beaconsfield's politics and of his literature. In the curious mixture of servility and of mockery which runs through his description of the lives and conversation of the high nobility, where reverence ends and contempt begins it is impossible to say. They are both obviously there, and, inconsistent as they seem, they are inextricably mixed.

This habit of mind, this inability to see much except the results of a large income and a patronage bestowed, wholly regardless of expense, on the tailor, the jeweller, the house-furnisher, and the ornamental gardener, are as the tares which choke the wheat in Lord Beaconsfield's writings. There are every now and then glimpses of better feelings and of a more disinterested enjoyment of what is beautiful in nature and in human life; but these things are evanescent. The angry sense of exclusion and the greed of coveted possession deform and discolour all but here and there a few pages. Apart from the purely satirical passages, the most natural and skilful touches are

those in which the talk and games of boys, their brag and self-confidence, their absolute theories of life and purposes of action unqualified by a dream of failure, are set forth ; with a certain humour that is not without its veiled pathos. There is some delicacy, too, mixed with much fine writing and superfine sentiment of the Minerva press school in Lord Beaconsfield's heroines. Women do not enter into competition with men, and there is no sense therefore of struggle with rivals fortunately placed, to embitter his views of them. On the whole, the sort of mixture of a fitful generosity and nobleness, with the recklessness of the brigand and pirate of the circulating library, marks Lord Beaconsfield's earlier stories.

In these social feelings, the hatred of a plebeian and of a man of foreign origin and despised race, for an aristocracy whose power he would have liked to share, whose houses, grounds, clothes, and jewellery he admired, and in whose society he pined to live, we get the inspiration of Lord Beaconsfield's policy, clothed in phrases borrowed from Bolingbroke. In 1834 he was elected a member of the Westminster Reform Club, and in the following year he appeared at Taunton as the candidate of the Conservative

Club and the supporter of Sir Robert Peel. These are facts not involving greater inconsistencies than those which mark every period of his life. He has been everything except a Whig, not only in succession, but simultaneously. His conflict with O'Connell, arising out of a speech made during his unsuccessful candidature at Taunton, has a certain interest as illustrating the qualities which were displayed by Lord Beaconsfield later in life in his assaults on Sir Robert Peel. He had courted O'Connell's political support when he was a candidate three years before at High Wycombe. He had indulged in private expressions of esteem and regard, which amounted to a solicitation of O'Connell's friendship. But O'Connell, after denouncing the base, bloody, and brutal Whigs, was supposed to have entered into the agreement with them known as the Tichfield House Compact. Next to his love of the Jews, Lord Beaconsfield's strongest passion, as we have seen, has been hatred of the Whigs; and O'Connell and Lord Melbourne's administration were both denounced in terms which our readers would not thank us for repeating. O'Connell repaid his assailant in kind. The license of political and personal controversy was

more excessive than it is now; but it may be safely said that English gentlemen, of the attainments and intellectual power of either of the two combatants, could not have indulged in the reciprocal ribaldry and insult with which they bespattered each other. O'Connell and Mr. Disraeli, however, came each from a servile race and a proscribed and insulted religion. Through no fault of their own, the vices of slaves were in their hearts and found expression in their tongues. Self-respect was difficult to men whose ancestors through a long course of centuries had been taught to cringe under a yoke, and who, when they did not speak low and in a bondsman's key, exploded in violent and indecent insults. We have spoken of the vices of slaves as illustrated in this reciprocal vituperation. We ought rather to have said that they displayed the vices of freedmen, from whom the restraints of servitude have been removed, but who have not yet learned the moral restraints of personal self-respect.

The parallel does, however, some injustice to O'Connell. With some of the vices of the slave, the railing and licentious tongue, and the slippery and tricky nature, he combined the large and generous

impulses of the patriot. Whether he had the self-denial which would have accepted poverty, or exile, or unpopularity for a just but losing cause, is fairly open to question. There are few traces in him of the temperament of the hero or of the martyr. But, though he had not the sensitive and exacting honour which would shrink from a paid and retained patriotism; though he did not feel that the suspicion of selling himself to the advocacy of aims which he knew to be illusions was at any cost to be shunned; there is no reason whatsoever for thinking that the paid patriot would ever have been the purchased apostate. Justice and freedom, his country and his church, were not simply articles of merchandise in which he carried on a trade: they were to him, in spite of many meaner and debasing elements, a sacred inspiration. This large and generous nature could feel the fascination of a great and noble cause. The mixture of the buffoon and the mountebank with the patriot and the national liberator, belongs to the transition period in Irish history and character. The old servitude and the newer freedom blend in this ambiguous result.

The disgrace of this gladiatorial combat of manu-

mitted slaves rests largely with the nation which, by proscribing them, their race, and their faith, helped to make them what they were. The penalty rests with it too. Sinister interests, and powerful influences which are not English, sway English politics. Finance and religion are cosmopolitan, and men whose country is their counting-house indirectly govern us. The rulers of the synagogue are more largely than is suspected the rulers of England. Lord Beaconsfield's language to O'Connell, as his language afterwards to Peel, passing at once from fulsome eulogy to unmeasured vituperation, simply exhibits the transition from the obsequiousness of the mercenary seeking a place to the insolence of the mercenary refused or dismissed from one. In the Letters of Runnymede, which appeared in the following year, these qualities are very conspicuous. The author directly addresses the leading Whig statesmen of the day by name in terms of personal insult, which do not differ from the abuse with which a street-beggar who has been denied alms, will sometimes pursue a passer-by.

In 1834, as we have seen from Mr. Greville's Diary, Mr. Disraeli was hesitating between two

patrons. There was a chance of his entering Parliament as a Radical by Lord Durham's aid, and some hope of doing so as a Tory by the help of Lord Lyndhurst. From whatever motive, the latter course was decided upon; and Mr. Disraeli went down to Taunton in 1835. Possibly his friendship for Lord Lyndhurst decided him. In the preface to Lothair, which contains Lord Beaconsfield's latest confessions, he speaks of Lord Lyndhurst as one of the two best friends he ever had. Lord Beaconsfield is just the man to appreciate the brilliant intellectual gifts of Lyndhurst, and he passes what may be a just eulogy upon the qualities he displayed in private life, "the tenderness of his disposition, the sweetness of his temper, his ripe scholarship, and the playfulness of his bright and airy spirit." Lord Lyndhurst's ostentatious indifference to political principles, and the readiness with which he took the large retaining fee of professional and political employment and promotion, by which he was bought off from the Liberal side in politics, and became the advocate of Tory principles, are not likely to have impressed Lord Beaconsfield unfavourably. Scruples, he has said, are usually the creatures of perplexity, not of con-

science; and he would have thought Lord Lyndhurst a fool to have thrown away his chances. The friendship of the two men had one political result in the Letter to a Noble and Learned Lord in Vindication of the English Constitution, which was published in 1835, the year following that in which the Revolutionary Epick appeared. The Vindication does not rank as a permanent contribution to English political philosophy. It is a queer medley of Burke and Bolingbroke, whose streams of thought do not readily mix, with that sort of Tory-Democratic doctrine in which renegade Radicals often endeavour to hide their apostasy.

The second of the two best friends Lord Beaconsfield ever had was "the inimitable D'Orsay, the most accomplished and the most engaging character that has figured in this century, who with the form and universal genius of an Alcibiades, combined a brilliant wit and a heart of quick affection, and who, placed in a public position, would have displayed a courage, a judgment, and a commanding intelligence which would have ranked him with the leaders of mankind." Henrietta Temple, which was dedicated to Count D'Orsay, contains a portrait of him under

the name of Count Alcibiades de Mirabel, from which one may judge of the qualities which in Lord Beaconsfield's view went to form the most accomplished and engaging character of this century. It might be unfair to judge the hero by the hero-worshipper; but it is not unfair to judge the hero-worshipper by the hero, or at any rate by his idealised conception of the hero. Count Alcibiades de Mirabel is a glorified Beau Brummel; and although the fault may be in Lord Beaconsfield's portraiture, the type of character is not doubtful. A dashing and showy social adventurer, who would have been a first-rate drawing-master, music-master, writing-master, French master, elocution-master, riding-master, courier, tailor, or cook—a master of all those arts by which "our life is only drest for show: mean handiwork of craftsman, cook, or groom"—is to Lord Beaconsfield, in his advanced age, the most accomplished and engaging character and universal genius of the century. The impulses which inspire the reason, and direct the conscience, and shape the life to nobler ends than political advancement or social enjoyment, are left out of his reckoning. His gaze is fixed on the D'Orsays, and the Tom Duncombes, and the Louis Napoleons,

with whom he associated at Gore House, the spendthrifts and adventurers and conspirators who found themselves in salons to which "gentlemen" only (gentlemen as distinguished from ladies) went. Prince Louis Napoleon conquered a precarious respectability by his reception at Windsor. Lord Beaconsfield achieved a similar position when he was acknowledged by the late Lord Derby. His properly political life begins with his entrance into Parliament in 1837 on the accession of the Queen. His literary career was at the same time brought to a pause of seven years, which was broken in 1844 by the publication of Coningsby. The two stories, Venetia and Henrietta Temple, published in 1837, and dedicated to Lord Lyndhurst and Count D'Orsay, have no political motive or character. They are attempts in pure art, and cannot be deemed successful save in a few strokes of social satire. Byron is out-Byronized, and the Werther period of Goethe out-Werthered. In Venetia, Caduras and Herbert are recognisable as Byron and Shelley, not by any truth of portraiture, but by plagiarism from their real lives. Lord Beaconsfield's dealings with the grand passions always suggest the Porte St. Martin and the Surrey Theatre.

His heroic vein lies perilously near to the mock heroic. There is a genuine breath of social and political satire animating his works which might have earned him a more honourable place in English literature than the parliamentary career, on the threshold of which we leave him for the present, has won for him in English history.

In writing this sketch, we lay our account with some censure, which we have no choice but to confront. The public career of Lord Beaconsfield is in our view the opprobrium of English politics during the past forty years, and his political character is, in the situation which he holds, a danger and defiance to England, and a threat to the peace of the world. There can be no reason why, without exaggeration, but without reserve, we should not say what we believe to be the truth about it. In discussing the actions of a politician from day to day it is neither desirable nor possible to be always examining character. Life is too short for business of that sort. The man must be taken for granted, in the position to which he has raised himself, and in which the public sees him with acquiescence, and even maintains

him with deliberate purpose. But this abeyance, for convenience' sake, of the moral judgment—this refusal to raise the previous question of general character and motives at every step in social intercourse or every stage of the public business—certainly does not involve the permanent renunciation of moral judgment. It is impossible to leave men to the appreciation of history only. To treat Lord Beaconsfield as if he were a Chatham, would simply be ludicrous twenty-five years hence. No one will grudge any paradox-monger of the twentieth century an amusement of that sort, if he can find nothing better or more plausible. But what will be historic folly then is a very present danger now, a danger against which it is impossible without what is called attacking an individual. We speak only of Lord Beaconsfield's public character. His admirers have not even the least right to protest against personality in politics. The life of the hero has been little more than a series of personal assaults.

This example, however, is the last by which we should desire to justify ourselves, and we have no intention of imitating it. The motive which has urged us to the task of studying his political career is of a

different order. At present the doctrine of the personal power is loudly proclaimed. An attempt is being made to revive the pretensions which George III. strove unsuccessfully to assert. This effort has always been tried under foreign inspiration. An able German, Baron Stockmar, undertook to instruct the Prince Consort in the theory and practice of the British Constitution, and the ideas of the Prince Consort were, of course, transmitted to the Queen, and shaped her practice. English statesmen, by a careless compliance, due in part to the deference which they found it difficult to withhold from one whom, to use a phrase of Lord Palmerston's, both as a sovereign and a lady it was unbecoming to thwart, too hastily yielded assent to doubtful pretensions. They even framed a theory of the Constitution to suit these ideas. Lord John Russell consented, on a celebrated occasion, to become the mouthpiece of Stockmarism in the House of Commons. The speech which he delivered when the action of the Prince Consort was called in question, has become historic. It is habitually cited by apologists who desire to aggrandize the power and functions of the Crown. Like almost all attempts to frame a theory of the Constitution, it

sought the living among the dead. By the time that a scheme of the English Constitution is concocted, it has almost of necessity ceased to be true. Depending, as the Constitution does, upon a balance of powers and forces which are in a constant state of relative growth and decline, the theory, even if it be brought up to the very latest date at the time when it is framed, is pretty sure to be out of date at the time when it is published. The position of things has changed. Baron Stockmar and the Prince Consort, drawing their doctrine out of old English books and historic precedents, illustrated by foreign, and chiefly German, analogies, adopted a procedure more certain perhaps than any other that could be devised, to lead them astray. Even if they possessed, as they certainly did not, the flexibility of mind and quickness of intuitive perception needful to discern the genius of a people and the character of institutions foreign to their personal experience, the method which they employed, and the conditions which surrounded them as observers, were almost of a necessity fatal to success. A court, even a court so pure as that of England, is the very last place in which parliamentary government can be fairly studied. A Prince Consort,

even a Prince Consort so admirable in intention, so respectable in character, so conscientious and painstaking in every relation of life as Prince Albert was, is the very last person to comprehend the working of Parliamentary institutions so developed as those of England. It is too rough to be congenial to a situation so delicate, difficult, and even equivocal as that of the husband of a reigning queen, and the father of an heir-apparent to the throne. The assistance of a kind of private physician-minister, such as Baron Stockmar was, would make matters rather worse than better. The disposition to minimize parliamentary authority, and to assert an influence of the court and of the Crown above and beyond them, is in such circumstances inevitable.

The premature death of the Prince Consort, the withdrawal of the Queen for a long term of years from active interest in political affairs, and the long Premierships of Lord Palmerston and Mr. Gladstone, men very dissimilar in most respects, but neither of them courtiers, nor possessing the qualities likely to make them the favourites of court favourites—men of great natural vigour of character, of strong purpose, and of resolute political convictions—all these things

have contributed to keep in check for a time the assumptions which Baron Stockmar encouraged. Under Lord Beaconsfield's administration they have revived, and revived in a more mischievous form and under worse guidance than ever before. They are ostentatiously set forth in courtier-like Memoirs appearing under the royal sanction, and in political manifestos of important Conservative organs. They fit in with the doctrines which Lord Beaconsfield has professed with more steadiness than any other of his fluctuating opinions, and which he probably seriously entertains. They are likely enough to receive very mischievous development at his hands—a development in which there may be the seeds of future troubles, unless a more modest view of the functions of the Crown in the Constitution than that which he encourages, be adopted and acted upon in future. The personal power of the monarch is in danger of becoming either a means of thwarting a minister who has the confidence of the country without the goodwill of the sovereign; or, what might be yet more calamitous, the personal power of an adroit flatterer and a daring adventurer is likely, under forms of obsequious submission, to take the place of the personal

power of the monarch. Cardinal Wolsey wrote, *Ego et rex meus.* Lord Beaconsfield makes a very near approach sometimes to a similar egotism. It is no longer possible to treat him with the half-contemptuous indulgence that was thought to be due to a political comedian. Up till 1874 Mr. Disraeli was treated by the whole political press of England as a joke, although he was often treated—and especially in the *Quarterly Review*—as a very misplaced and untimely joke. In 1878, without being a serious personage, he holds very serious issues in his hands. It is essential that men should be reminded what manner of man he is, to whom the English people, the English Parliament, and the Queen of England, have committed a sort of political dictatorship.

III.

From 1837 to 1852.

Lord Beaconsfield's political adventures have three stages. The first, extending from 1826 to 1837, exhibits his beginnings in literature and politics, and shows how he struggled with reluctant constituencies until at last he forced his way into the House of Commons. It is really the most important of all, for in it the man was formed and displayed, and the peculiarities of his character and genius were disclosed with less restraint than afterwards. He gambolled with unchecked license. The fierce play of an untamed nature gave itself free vent. Afterwards, Lord Beaconsfield found it necessary to clothe himself in parliamentary, official, and social decorum. Only now and then in the wild sallies, and still oftener in the demure smile, do we see that the man is in disguise. Still, every now and then the aboriginal savage looks through his eyes, and occasionally shrieks in his voice, and displays itself in his excited

gestures. The impish "nature breaks at seasons through the gilded pale." The next period is compressed within the years from 1837 to 1852. It records Lord Beaconsfield's struggles in the House of Commons to parliamentary toleration, to parliamentary recognition, to parliamentary eminence, through the spokesmanship first of a rather ridiculous coterie, then of an angry faction, and afterwards of an organized party, raising him into office, and the ministerial leadership in the House of Commons. Lord Beaconsfield began by wearing the livery of Peel; he then, with ribbons in his hat and tabor in his mouth, masqueraded as a rural swain, dancing with his young England companions round a Maypole; and finally in the breeches and top-boots of a stage squire, smacked his hunting whip against his thigh, denounced the villainy of the traitor Peel, who had deceived him and other simple-minded country gentlemen into a belief that he was a Protectionist, and a friend of the land and of the corn laws, while he was nothing but a manufacturer and free-trader. Lord Beaconsfield's rapid changes of costume and character resemble those of the elder and younger Mathews in some of their startling transformations. The third

period of his political adventures, in which England now has the perilous honour and excitement of living, is that of his official and ex-official life. It extends from the year 1852 to this present month of June, 1878, and probably will extend considerably beyond it. It is really that which most interests the world; but the second period, which engages us now, must first be rapidly surveyed.

The year 1837 then saw Mr. Disraeli fairly launched in the career in which for more than forty years he has played a conspicuous, and for thirty of those forty, a distinguished, and on some questions, a decisive part. The law, since altered, required that a new parliament shall be summoned on the accession of a new sovereign; and he was a member of the first House of Commons that met under the reign of Queen Victoria. He had been elected for Maidstone. He won this victory not over his old enemies the Whigs, but over his former friends and allies, the Radicals, defeating the veteran Colonel Perronet Thompson. This Barrabean preference on the part of the Kentish borough has since been atoned for by wiser elections to subsequent parliaments. Such triumphs of the sciolist and the adventurer over the

man of pure and public purpose, of fixed principles, and of reasoned convictions, are, however, incidents of public life too common and natural to attract much attention. It has been Lord Beaconsfield's purpose in life to advance himself, and he has succeeded. It was the purpose of Colonel Perronet Thompson to advance the doctrines which he believed to be true, and to promote the reforms which he deemed to be necessary. Both have had the triumph which they most coveted. Each illustrates the value of singleness of purpose, be the purpose good or evil, in public or in private life. It is natural to desire that a man who promotes a great cause shall also promote himself. But the conditions of human life and character do not often allow of this double victory; and the man who has this twofold aim in view is not likely to realize either part of it. Usually he must either sacrifice himself to his cause, or his cause to himself. To desire to be disinterested and rewarded is a state of mind logically contradictory, but in practice too easily and too frequently realized. To strive only for principles, and to reap place and power, titles and decorations, public honour and popular gratitude, is a combination very flattering

to that inward eye which is the bliss of meditative and ambitious solitude. The internal delight of satisfied virtue, and the gratified vanity of external honours, are scarcely to be had together except in the fanciful forecast of a sentimental virtue veiling personal greed. The man who has no cause but himself, and the man who, if we may say so, has no self but his cause, are alone likely to reach the goal that they set before them. The men who are a little for virtue and a great deal for themselves will probably end by being all for themselves, and so sink into the first class. The men who are too virtuous to be unscrupulous, but not virtuous enough to lose sight of themselves, will probably share the misfortune of the dog that courses two hares at once. Lord Beaconsfield has had one steady and consistent purpose through life; and, to use Burke's expression, he has varied his means in order to preserve the essential unity of his end. To climb ever higher and higher, to fix more and more steadily the public gaze, to wield power, to receive and distribute honours, to be the talk of his coterie, of England, of Europe, of the world, has been his aim, and in this he has succeeded. No career ever illustrated more remarkably the vir-

tues, if they be such apart from the ends to which they are directed, of steady and unshaken purpose, of perseverance, patience, and audacity, of the skill which knows when to wait and when to act. Lord Beaconsfield is the great modern professor and practitioner in its personal application of that doctrine of opportunism, which Peel, in its more legitimate political aspects, made a system in England, and to which the tactics of M. Gambetta have given a name in France. The debauching effect of the French Empire, even upon such opponents as the Republican leader of France, is to be seen in his undisguised admiration for Lord Beaconsfield.

Lord Beaconsfield, who had been alternately a Tory-Radical, and a Radical-Tory, as convenience might dictate, appeared at Maidstone as a simple Conservative. For the next six or seven years of his life he can best be described by a term which had not then taken its place in political nomenclature. He was a Peelite, though not of course in the later meaning of the word, in which it denoted a school of political doctrine and practice. He was a Peelite in a more personal sense, such as that in which the "gallant, gay domestics" of High Life below Stairs

assume the names, as they wear the livery, of the noblemen and gentlemen on whom they condescend to wait. His insight into personal character enabled him to single out the really capable man of his age. His perception of political tendencies led him to recognise that the hour was bringing his opportunity to the man; and he flung himself into the current which was carrying place and power, and meaner things and persons with it, to the feet of Peel. The impatience and alarmed prejudices of William IV. had anticipated matters. But the extraordinary skill and address with which Sir Robert Peel, in 1834—5, had maintained himself as the Minister of a minority, imposed by the royal pleasure upon a hostile Parliament and country, only showed that the approaching time had not yet arrived. It illustrated all the more signally the unrivalled ascendancy of the man. Curiously enough, it has fallen to Lord Beaconsfield to display more than once a somewhat similar power as the leader of a Government in a minority, before showing what he could do as a Prime Minister with an undisputed majority behind him. In 1836 Lord Beaconsfield had addressed one of the letters of Runnymede to Sir Robert Peel. It is characteristic

of the upholsterer and ornamental gardener in the present Prime Minister, that his expressions of almost adoring confidence in the man are mingled with expressions of admiration of the big house and well-laid out grounds in which Sir Robert Peel spent his retirement. Lord Beaconsfield does not hate Persian displays or love a Sabine farm. A great man not clothed in purple and fine linen, nor faring sumptuously every day, a great man moderately housed and attended, is to him scarcely a great man at all. "The halls and bowers of Drayton; those gardens and that library where you have realised the romance of Verulam and where you enjoy the lettered ease that Temple loved," rouse the ingenuous enthusiast to a rapturous eloquence which shows that George Robins need not have lacked a successor if Lord Beaconsfield had had anything but himself to put up to auction. These things are as essential to his image of Sir Robert Peel as the panoply of "your splendid talents and your spotless character." Sir Robert Peel was declared to be "like the Knight of Rhodes" in Schiller's heroic ballad, "the only hope of a suffering isle." The letter is a lyrical invocation, a sort of prose-parody on the ode in which Horace

compared Augustus to Jupiter, to the equal discredit of the god, the emperor, and the poet. Lord Beaconsfield saw that the opportunity of Peel and of the Conservative party was coming, and he lost no time in proclaiming himself on the side of the winners.

The electioneering addresses at Maidstone were couched in the same vein as the letters of Runnymede. That personal and political hatred of the Whigs, which is one of the few things in which he has been consistent, is freely expressed. Lord Beaconsfield perceived that they were a declining and perishing party, though they still had a name to live, and persisted in existence from mere continuance. As a tree, whose roots are decaying in the earth, still for a season puts forth leaves and flowers, and sometimes bears good fruit, so the Whigs have for a generation produced useful measures. But practically their work was done in 1832. The Reform Bill, which was their greatest achievement, destroyed them as well as the abuses at which it was aimed. The conditions of political existence were wholly changed; and in these altered conditions the Whig party could not flourish. It is unjust to deny the genuineness of their Liberalism and the value of their services to Liberalism.

Under the political conditions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the contest against the despotism of the later Stuarts, and against the pretensions of George III. to magnify the prerogatives and personal power of the Crown, could be waged with success only by the great houses. An oligarchical character was therefore almost of necessity impressed upon the defence of the principles of the constitution. The three statesmen whom, after Bolingbroke and Wyndham, Lord Beaconsfield most admires, are Chatham, Shelburne, and the younger Pitt. He eulogises their Liberal doctrines with respect to constitutional liberty, to freedom of trade, and Parliamentary reform, as genuine Toryism. But they derived those doctrines from Whig traditions in the first case, to which in the two latter must be added the influence of Adam Smith's writings, and of personal intercourse with the Nonconformists Price and Priestley. There was nothing in Toryism to make Chatham and Shelburne advocates of American freedom, nor to make Shelburne and the younger Pitt defenders of free-trade. The men whom Lord Beaconsfield calls Tories were known in their own time more correctly as Chatham Whigs, that is to say, they were scarcely Whigs at all. They tried,

with a real though a premature and inopportune wisdom, a wisdom therefore rather of speculation than of practice, to be Liberals without being Whigs. Chatham was strong enough in virtue of his wonderful ascendancy of personal character, and of his transcendent success in foreign policy and the conduct of our European wars, to hold his own against both the Crown and the great families. Shelburne, theoretically, and to some extent in practice, an advanced Liberal of the modern type, was obliged to strengthen himself by the support of the Crown against Whig oligarchy, and as theory often follows practice, he was led to formulate doctrines of a patriot king ruling independently of parties, which brought him dangerously near to the insidious Tory democracy of Bolingbroke. The domestic factions into which the French Revolution divided English parties made Pitt, who never was a Tory, the head of a Tory government and the agent of a Tory policy. But in all that does these men most honour, in all that makes party zealotry anxious to claim the sanction of their names, they were only not Whigs, because they were something more and better than Whigs. They were Liberals of a more modern type, endeavouring to emancipate

themselves too soon from the conditions under which alone a Liberal policy was possible in the eighteenth century. They were thus drawn into dangerous alliances with Tory principle of personal rule, and in the case of Pitt into a Tory policy both in home and foreign politics. The Whigs were an oligarchical party, because the great families opposed the only organization by which the pretensions of the Crown could be effectually combated, and the principles established in 1689, could be defended against the Court and against Church-and-king-mobs.

This strange combination of oligarchical rule and liberal principle, inevitable and useful though it was, had done its work in 1832. From that time it became an anachronism and an offence. A century and a half of struggle under these conditions has ineffaceably stamped its character upon the Whig aristocracy. A Whig is a Liberal who believes that Liberal principles can be only asserted under the guardianship and by the representatives of certain old families. He imports the historic conditions of the eighteenth century into the nineteenth. He does not perceive that the Reform Act of 1832 in part, and that of 1867 almost completely, abolished him; and that

modern Liberalism, whether it be moderate or advanced, exists under conditions involving his transformation or his departure from the political scene. The hot-house protection of an oligarchical party, needful to the delicate plant of constitutional freedom, is simply a hindrance to the health and development of the vigorous tree. The great noble in politics must share the fate of the patron in literature. The Whigs deserve that historic honour and political gratitude which Lord Beaconsfield denies them. But the doom which falls on those who have done their work, though it may have been a noble one, cannot be avoided. If, however, the aristocratic patronage of Liberal principles is obsolete, the equal service of Liberals of every class, patrician or plebeian, to the common cause is still to be desired. The principle of exclusion directed against men of rank and lineage would of course be as absurd as the principle of exclusion asserted by them. There is little danger in the present constitution of English society that any such proscription will be attempted. Name and birth and wealth will always have something more than their proper advantage, if any advantage be proper in English political life. If anything could re-

vive Lord Beaconsfield's pet aversion, the Venetian oligarchy, it would be the re-establishment of that personal power of the Crown of which he has almost always been the advocate in theory, and which he seems inclined to assert in practice. But the popular power does not now need to shelter itself, like the towns of the Middle Ages, in the shadow of some feudal castle. It is not for Lord Beaconsfield to bring us back to the obsolete struggles of the time of Anne and of the first three Georges. England is no longer merely the spectatress, or the stake, of the game for ascendancy, played by monarchy and aristocracy.

The principal charge which Lord Beaconsfield has made against the Whigs is their indifference to the interests and feelings of the poor. The Condition-of-England question did not occupy them. No imputation is more entirely devoid of truth. The great characteristic of English politics since the passing of the Reform Act is the part which social politics have played in it. Either in principle or in actual fact the disputes of generations had been settled during the years which immediately preceded, or in those which closely followed, the great measure of 1832. Reli-

gious liberty, involving in its further development religious equality, won the victory which was sure to carry all the rest with it, when the Tests and Corporation Acts were repealed, and Catholic Emancipation was achieved. The system on which Ireland must be governed was decided when the latter measure was passed, and it was further acknowledged in the unsectarian character of the National System of Education established in Ireland. The unsuccessful Appropriation Clause contained in principle Irish re-establishment; and the Civil Marriages Act was a further extrusion of the ecclesiastical principle by the secular in human affairs. The ascendancy of the democratic principle in the constitution, though yet waiting its accomplishment, had the promise of its fulfilment in the Reform Act of 1832. The Poor Relief Act, notwithstanding its imputed harshness, proclaimed to the poor the doctrine of energy and self-reliance, and emancipated them from a degrading and servile dependence on the alms of the rich. The legislation of Huskisson contained within it the germs of that passing of Free Trade, which has since been more completely developed than any other acknowledged principle in our legislation. The Munici-

pal Corporations Act established local self-government, though it did not apply it completely and universally or thoroughly. The final severance, at the accession of the Queen, of the Crown of Hanover from that of England, was the pledge of a disentanglement from European projects and alliances, and symbolized the substitution of an insular for a continental policy in foreign affairs.

The Queen succeeded to an era of settled questions, of questions settled that is in principle, though their development and application still had to be contended for. Hence the calm and steady progress which has been the characteristic hitherto of her forty years' reign. The force of facts, that practical logic which may be disputed but cannot be long disobeyed, made Conservative as well as Liberal governments, Peel as well as Melbourne and Russell, the heads and instruments of that progress. The Reform Act, and the measures of civil, religious, and commercial freedom which immediately preceded and followed, called a new England into existence; and the first business of those who had created or discovered it was to survey the country, and trace what manner of land it was on which they were about to enter.

Hitherto it had been a *terra incognita* to those who ruled it. Its new rulers did their best to find out what it was like. This was the period when, according to Sydney Smith, "the whole earth was in fact in commission." *Sanitas sanitatum, omnia sanitas* is the phrase in which Lord Beaconsfield a few years ago summed up his domestic policy. Systematic inquiries into the prevalence of fever in the metropolis; into the need of open spaces; into the practice of interment in towns; into the conditions of the labouring classes, first in England and Wales, and afterwards in Scotland; into the employment of women and children in mines; the reduction of the hours of labour in factories; grants in aid of education;—these are but some of the proofs that the health of the people, physical and moral, from the first engaged the attention of the Liberal governments which ruled England during the opening years of the present reign. That they did not do more, was due in part, no doubt, to their own hesitation and infirmity, but in a greater degree still to the resistance, on most of these questions, which they met from the party to which Lord Beaconsfield attached himself. Lord Beaconsfield's attempts to represent England as gov-

erned before the Reform Act by an oligarchy indifferent to the poor, and ruled since by a plutocracy hostile to them, have about as much historic truth as we look for, or at any rate find, in his statements.

The Parliament in which Lord Beaconsfield took his seat was elected under the Whig Ministry which the failure of King William IV.'s attempt to govern by a Conservative minority in the House of Commons had restored to office with a parliamentary majority, won at the general election of 1835. Its achievements had been the Municipal Corporation Act, the Tithe Commutation Act, the General Registration Act, the reduction of the stamp duty on newspapers and of the duty on paper, the Act allowing counsel to prisoners, and a partial reform of the jail system of the country—measures one of them of the first magnitude, and others important as being the first steps taken in a direction in which large advances have been made since. Its great failure was to give effect to the motion for the appropriation to educational purposes of the surplus revenues of the Irish Church, which had brought the Whigs back to office. The Ministry itself was in 1837 practically what it had been in 1835.

The letters of Runnymede abound in compliments to its leading members, who are addressed frankly in the second person. Lord Melbourne is "the sleekest swine in epicurean sty." "Contemptible as you are," he is told—yet so-and-so, and so, which we need not quote. "With the exception of an annual oration against Parliamentary Reform, your career in the House of Commons was never remarkably distinguished." "When I recall to my bewildered memory the perplexing circumstance that William Lamb is Prime Minister of England, it seems to me that I recollect with labour the crowning incident of some grotesque dream." "It is perhaps hopeless that your lordship should rouse yourself from the embraces of that Siren Deridia, to whose fatal influence you are not less a slave than our second Charles." Mr. Disraeli's character of Lord Melbourne is a savage version of the well-known banter of Sydney Smith. Lord John Russell is informed: "Your character is a curious one . . . . You were born with a strong ambition and a feeble intellect." He is flattered with the statements that "your intellect produced" in succession "the feeblest tragedy in our language," "the feeblest romance in our literature," and "the

feeblest political essay on record." "Your memoirs of the Affairs of Europe . . . retailed in frigid sentences, a feeble compilation from the gossip of those pocket tomes of small talk, which abound in French literature . . . This luckless production closed your literary career; you flung down your futile pen in incapable despair; and your feeble intellect having failed in literature, your strong ambition took refuge in politics." As an orator, "cold, inanimate, with a weak voice, and a mincing manner, the failure of your intellect was complete." Under this double disappointment, "you subsided for some years into a state of listless moroseness, which was even pitiable." "This was the period when, among your intimates, you talked of retiring from that public life in which you had not succeeded in making yourself public, when you traced, like a feeble Catiline, the avenues of Holland House." "Your friends always treated you with a species of contempt." "A miniature Mokanna, you are now exhaling upon the constitution of your country. . . . . all that long-hoarded venom and all those distempered humours that have for years accumulated in your petty heart, and tainted the current of your mortified life." Lord John Rus-

sell is told that he is "an infinitely small scarabæus." When the foreigner learns "that you are the leader of the House of Commons, our traveller may begin to comprehend how the Egyptians worshipped AN INSECT."

Later in Mr. Disraeli's career, it became his cue to flatter Lord Russell as resolutely as in the letters of Runnymede he had bespattered him. In *Coningsby*, his "strong ambition" and "dark and dishonourable intrigues" are converted into "this moral intrepidity which prompts him ever to dare that which his intellect assures him is politic. He is consequently at the same time sagacious and bold in council; as an administrator, he is prompt and indefatigable." The "cold and inanimate" temperament, the "weak voice and mincing manner," "the imbecile accents that struggle for sound in the chamber echoing but a few years back with the glowing periods of Canning," become "physical deficiencies which even a Demosthenic impulse could scarcely overcome." But these disadvantages detract little from the parliamentary influence of a statesman who "is experienced in debate, quick in reply, fertile in resources, takes large views, and frequently compensates for a dry and hesitat-

ing manner by the expression of those noble truths that flash across the fancy, and rise spontaneously to the lips of men of poetic temperament when addressing popular assemblies." "The noble" of the Runnymede letters, "who with a historic name and no fortune, a vast ambition and a baulked career, and soured, not to say malignant, from disappointment," offered "prime materials for the leader of a revolutionary faction," becomes one whose "private life of dignified repute," and "the antecedents of whose birth and rank," added to the personal qualities before eulogised, make the best leader the Whigs have ever had or could have." The "individual" of Runnymede, "who, on the principle that good vinegar is the corruption of bad wine, has been metamorphosed from an incapable author into an eminent politician," becomes in the biography of Lord George Bentinck an instance, along with Mr. Burke, "Caius Julius," and Frederick the Great, of the union of pre-eminent capacity, both in meditation and in action. It is pretty certain that Lord Beaconsfield never thought as ill or as highly of Lord John Russell as he has at different times pretended to do. The two characters which he has drawn of this eminent statesman throw

light upon his treatment of Sir Robert Peel, for whom a different fate was reserved, to be first the victim of Lord Beaconsfield's praise, and then the object of his slander—"tooth that poisons as it bites."

We need not quote further flowers of speech from the garlands of compliments with which Lord Beaconsfield crowned the smaller members of the Whig cabinet which he found in power when he entered Parliament in 1837. But it may be interesting to recall some of the compliments which he addressed to Lord Palmerston. Lord Palmerston is described as a minister who has maintained himself in power "in spite of the contempt of a whole nation." "Our language commands no expression of scorn which has not been exhausted in the celebration of your character, there is no conceivable idea of degradation which has not been at some period or another associated with your career." He is congratulated on "that dexterity which has never deserted you, and which seems a happy compound of the smartness of an attorney's clerk and the intrigue of a Greek of the lower empire." Lord Palmerston's parliamentary shortcomings are attributed rather to "a want of

breeding than to a deficiency of self-esteem. The leader of the Whig Opposition was wont to say . . . that your lordship reminded him of a favourite footman on easy terms with his mistress." The qualities exhibited in these elegant extracts are those which Lord Beaconsfield offered for sale, as he stood idle in the political market-place, because as yet no man had hired him. These gifts of political scurrility he brought with him into the House of Commons. He had shown them before in his encounters with O'Connell, and he was afterwards to display them in his tirades against Sir Robert Peel, at this period the subject of his unbounded eulogy.

The beginning of Lord Beaconsfield's parliamentary career did not give much promise of the distinction he has since obtained. We need not tell the old story of the failure of his first speech, and of the verified prediction of subsequent success which it contained. That was rather a cry of anguish, the breathing of "a hope which was too like despair for patience to smother," than an expression of reasonable and manly self-confidence, which in such circumstances would have waited for the event, rather than have vaunted itself in prospective braggadocio

Lord Beaconsfield discovered that he was a stranger in the House of Commons; and, with the instinct of an intelligent foreigner, he set himself to learn the language and to acquire the usages of this strange community in which he found himself, and in which he was determined to push his fortunes. He spoke with moderate success on some of the principal topics that occupied this Parliament, working with the regular Opposition headed by Sir Robert Peel, but not taking a prominent part in it. The organized warfare of regular parties was not at that time suited to Mr. Disraeli's genius, which was then of the guerilla order. He went with what has since been called the "Front Opposition Bench," in resisting Lord John Russell's measures, without much discrimination as to their character. He spoke against the grants in aid of education, and against the Repeal of the Corn Laws, with respect to which and to Free-trade generally he followed the changing tactics and adapted himself to the growing Liberalism of Sir Robert Peel.

His most remarkable avowal was his declaration, which had some boldness and generosity, of sympathy with the Chartists, though he disapproved of the

Charter. Lord Beaconsfield has shown from time to time imaginative sensitiveness for the sufferings of the poor, and an understanding of the motives which impelled the Chartist agitation. In *Sibyl* we have the expressions of this sympathy, as in *Lothair* there is certainly an intelligent understanding, which seems to betray a covert liking for the revolutionary projects and leaders of the continent. A very little change in circumstances, or perhaps, we should rather say, a slight but vital modification of character, might have made Lord Beaconsfield the ally of Fergus O'Connor and the partisan of Mazzini. The hand which drew Walter Gerard and Stephen Morley, and Sybil herself, which sketched Mirandola and Captain Bruges and Theodora, the Marianne and the National Convention and the Fenian Brotherhood, is not that of a coarse caricaturist and assailant. There is a good deal of true insight and of kindly appreciation in Lord Beaconsfield's sketches of men and organizations, who to the vulgar and scared rich are objects at once of terror and contempt. But the thing never goes beyond an artistic sentiment. Chartists and Mazzinists are to him picturesque figures in a drama. There is as little that is moral in his feelings towards

them, as in a sensitiveness to music. Lord Beaconsfield's fatal love of rank and wealth and power has made him always more ready to use the prejudices of their possessors for his own political advancement, than to combat them in the interests of persons and classes for whose sufferings he has shown in his novels and in his speeches a literary and oratorical tenderness, and whose aims he has understood and considerately interpreted. Acts of personal kindness are attributed to him, as in the case of the Chartist poet, Thomas Cooper, and we are glad to believe in their genuineness. The words of kindly compassion which Lord Beaconsfield gives to Mr. Smith O'Brien, in his life of Lord George Bentinck, are creditable to him. He can understand motives and characters which break loose from routine, even into hare-brained and Quixotic enterprises. Lord Beaconsfield could write a description of Mazzini, under the name of Mirandola, which even his friends might accept; but he vilified Mazzini in his own name and character, and pursued him in the persons of his friends in the House of Commons. He could make heroes of the Chartist leaders and respectable enthusiasts of Fenian head-centres, but he poured contempt on the obsolete

advocates of stale sedition in Parliament. The fine and generous qualities which are not absent from Lord Beaconsfield's writings, are the weightiest condemnation of his public conduct. So far as practical politics are concerned, Lord Beaconsfield's sympathy for the sufferings of the poor, and his intelligence of their aims, even when most vain and mischievous, does little more than furnish a basis for his denunciations of Whig indifference to these things.

The Parliament which the hostile vote of 1841 brought to a close, left Lord Beaconsfield in a political position which might have made hopes of a junior lordship, or even an under-secretaryship, not unreasonable in the almost certain event of the general election returning a Conservative majority to the House of Commons. On the dissolution of Parliament, Lord Beaconsfield sought the suffrages, not of Maidstone, but of Shrewsbury. After a contest marked by the coarsest personalities, of which this time he was rather the object than the author, he was returned second on the poll, with a Conservative colleague, the Liberals being in a comparatively small minority. Sir Robert Peel was still the object of his unmeasured eulogy and of his unqualified confidence.

He described himself as "his humble but fervent supporter." He used something like the language of a stage confidant, imparting secrets into which he had been admitted for the sake of reassuring the electors of Shrewsbury. Sir Robert Peel was almost too great a man for the merely finite intelligence of Lord Beaconsfield completely to grasp. He represented himself as baffled, "when he attempted to discover how from the scattered remnants of a political party Sir Robert Peel had collected a power sufficient to direct the fate of an empire . . . and in an age of quick transition he had discovered the tone and spirit of the age." The contemplation of such achievements left him lost in admiration for Sir Robert Peel's "great talents and matchless foresight." It was as a supporter of Sir Robert Peel, and nothing else, that he was elected for Shrewsbury in 1841, and he proclaimed the satisfaction which he had had in "writing to Sir Robert Peel to inform him that the electors of Shrewsbury had done their duty."

In August, 1841, the Whigs, who had appealed to the country, faced on the ministerial benches a Conservative majority in the House of Commons. Practically they had been defeated at the general election

upon the question of a modification of commercial legislation in the direction of freer trade, but the amendment to the Address which was moved by the Opposition did not directly raise that issue. In that fact was an indication, which Lord Beaconsfield at least understood, that Sir Robert Peel was not a candidate for power as a minister pledged to Protection. Whoever else may have been deceived, he was not. In the speech which he made on the motion of want of confidence, Lord Beaconsfield took pains to point out that Sir Robert Peel was not pledged to Protection, and moreover that it was not an article of the Tory creed. The election, he said, did not turn on the question of the import duties and of the commercial reforms proposed by the Whigs, but on their incapacity for affairs and their inability to carry out their own policy. The progress of commercial reform had been stopped by the Reform Act. In other words, the principles of Huskisson, of whom Peel had been the colleague, and was, in a certain sense, the successor, had failed to receive their proper development through the accession of the Whigs to power. In the debate on Sir Robert Peel's financial scheme of 1842, a scheme which practically, though

timidly, applied the doctrines of free-trade, and which was introduced by the Prime Minister in a speech which stated and defended them theoretically, Lord Beaconsfield again vindicated both the measures and the doctrines of his chief. He repeated his statement that the Tories were the true and original free-traders. Mr. Pitt, in 1787, first promulgated free-trade principles, which were opposed by Fox, Sheridan, and Burke, which Lord Hawkesbury, Mr. Robinson, and Mr. Wallace developed, which Mr. Huskisson received from them, and which Sir Robert Peel had taken up from him. The Tories passed from hand to hand the torch of sound economic doctrine which the Whigs strove to blow out. Sir Robert Peel was, in this respect, by legitimate affiliation through the statesmen just named, the lineal descendant and true representative of Mr. Pitt. Afterwards, when the opportunity arose of heading the revolt against Sir Robert Peel on pretexts of which Lord Beaconsfield himself had years before shown the hollowness, he discovered that the true Free-Trader was the judicious Protectionist; and he invented a phrase to cover this ingenious combination. The phrase was "regulated competition." Mr. Pitt, Mr.

Wallace, Mr. Robinson, Mr. Huskisson, and the rest, were "regulated competitors." Competition is regulated when in a race you leave one runner free and tie the legs of the others. The barren question whether free-trade owes most to Tories or to Whigs is only part, however, of a larger discussion, of which Lord Beaconsfield has always been fond, and on which we have already spoken at some length. He has from time to time contended that the Tories and not the Whigs are the true reformers. His case consists in a reference to the name of Mr. Pitt, who was the author of a project of household suffrage, and to those of Lord Shelburne and even Lord Chatham. These statesmen, as we have shown, were neither orthodox Whigs, still less genuine Tories. They were in their characteristic opinions, Reformers, who constituted in the eighteenth century the Liberal doctrine of the nineteenth century.

It is clear from what has preceded that Lord Beaconsfield understood perfectly this issue which was placed before the country in the general election of 1841, the principles of commercial policy on which Sir Robert Peel's Government was formed, and the character of its first measures of which the Repeal of

the Corn Laws was the natural and inevitable development. In that Government, as all the world knows, he was not included. In one of the speeches which he made,—in that saturnalia of personal vilification in which the emancipated slave exceeded the extremest license of his order,—Sir Robert Peel referred to the fact that at one time Mr. Disraeli had given practical signs of his confidence in him by his expressed willingness to take office. Overtures, it is believed, were made which were not prosecuted, and the discontinuance of which was not perhaps explained with sufficient courtesy to the expectant minister, and has not been explained to the public. When the memoirs and correspondence of Sir Robert Peel are published, a disclosure, it is believed, will take place which will furnish a fresh illustration of, if it does not throw new light on the characters, of the two eminent men concerned. It is curious to reflect on what might have been Mr. Disraeli's career, had he taken the subordinate office under the new Conservative Government, which was dangled before his longing eyes only to be withdrawn from his grasp. It would possibly have been more respectable—it is not likely to have been so distinguished. Mr. Dis-

raeli was scarcely the man to work his way up by parliamentary docility and administrative industry and success, through an ascending scale of more and more important parts, to a high place in the Cabinet. He is a man of surprises and seizures, likely either to gain everything by a bound, or to fall back bruised, and broken, and empty-handed. It might have been left to him, if Sir Robert Peel had been kinder, to illustrate, after the manner of the late Mr. Wilson Croker, that union of action and contemplation, of literature and affairs, of which Caius Julius, Frederick the Great, "both eminently literary characters," Mr. Burke, and Lord John Russell were signal instances, and to have furnished another Rigby to the mocking pen of some succeeding satirist. Fortune was better disposed to Mr. Disraeli than she seemed to be, and the under-secretary *manqué* was the material out of which the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Prime Minister and the successor of Sir Robert Peel in the leadership of the Conservative party was framed.

The success of Sir Robert Peel's second administration was a disproof of the sorrowful foreboding with which the Duke of Wellington had beheld the

accession of a female sovereign. The Duke of Wellington mournfully contrasted his own superficial graces and accomplishments and those of Sir Robert Peel with the fascinations of the adorable Melbourne. "There is no chance of a Conservative Government," he is reported to have said; "I have no small talk, and Peel has no manners." Happily, small talk and manners are not the conditions of office under a parliamentary system, even though it be a constitutional monarchy with a female sovereign on the throne. It is creditable to the Queen that no minister ever won her confidence and personal friendship so completely as Sir Robert Peel, unless, upon evidence happily as yet inconclusive, we are to make an exception of Lord Beaconsfield himself. Lord Beaconsfield is fond of dwelling upon Sir Robert Peel's defects of manner, his constraint and awkwardness, and his incapacity of making an after-dinner speech without "saying something stilted and even a little ridiculous," though he parts from the contemplation of these faults in a great parliamentary statesman with a pious valediction, a "peace be to his ashes." It was one of Sir Robert Peel's inconsistencies that the man who consented to take office at the personal dictation

of William IV., under conditions as unconstitutional as those which have made the 16th of May a memorable date in French history, should have resisted with spirit and firmness the ill-advised attempt of the Queen, or rather of her Whig advisers, to force the ladies of the great Whig men as bedchamber women upon a Conservative Government. It is not astonishing to find Mr. Disraeli approving Sir Robert Peel's conduct in 1834, for he approved everything Sir Robert Peel did; and, moreover, it was in harmony with the lessons he himself had learned and taught out of Bolingbroke. In the Runnymede letters he praises Sir Robert Peel for having accepted the premiership in 1834, and having kept it until 1835, in spite of a hostile parliamentary majority. "You retained your post," he adds, "until you found you were endangering the King's prerogative, to support which you had alone accepted his Majesty's confidence." In his speech upon the motion of want of confidence in Lord Melbourne's Government, in 1841, he denounced in the strongest language the use of the sovereign's name, the attempt to make "the majesty of England a second candidate upon some paltry poll," and the presumed intention of the Whig minis-

try to defy the House of Commons, and, in spite of a hostile vote, to declare that the Government, in being supported by the Crown, had the best support a minister could have. This is sound constitutional doctrine. It has often been asserted against Lord Beaconsfield himself, notably by Mr. Bright in 1867. But Lord Beaconsfield never expresses sound constitutional principles, except when the Whigs have been betrayed into unsound constitutional practice, or are suspected of it.

Mr. Disraeli's parliamentary career from 1841 to 1846 follows like a shadow the history of Sir Robert Peel's administration. But the shade is at last seen to be thrown by a sullen cloud. For a time he was the *umbra* of the prime minister. Soon the fervent blessings of the mendicant are exchanged for doubtful and angry looks, and afterwards for threats and imprecations. Yet Sir Robert Peel simply followed the course which Mr. Disraeli had approvingly predicted, and which he had described as the triumph of consummate statesmanship. In a very early speech he lays down doctrines of political casuistry, which would cover acts far more questionable than any which, on the least favourable reading of his motives

and conduct, can be attributed to Sir Robert Peel, and which would even shelter Lord Beaconsfield's own career from moral censure. "A statesman," he said, "is the creature of his age, the child of circumstances, the creation of his times. A statesman is essentially a practical character; and when he is called upon to take office, he is not to inquire what his opinions might or might not have been upon this or upon that subject, he is only to ascertain the needful, the beneficial, and the most feasible manner in which affairs are to be carried on. The fact is, that the conduct and opinions of public men must not be too curiously contrasted in a free and aspiring country. The people have their passions, and it is even the duty of public men occasionally to adopt sentiments with which they do not sympathise. . . . . I laugh, therefore, at the objections against a man that at a former period of his career he advocated a policy different to his present one; all I seek to ascertain is whether his present policy is a necessary expedient; whether he is at the present moment prepared to serve his country according to its present necessities."

The moral principles on which Lord Beaconsfield

was prepared to censure Sir Robert Peel are not clearly deducible from this passage, which he might publish as the text of a political *Apologia pro vita sua*. But the contemplation of Sir Robert Peel's actual career in the House of Commons from Mr. Disraeli's impartial position outside the administration, recalled this somewhat lax moralist to a severer political virtue. Growing, but not yet decided, disapproval is indicated in the tone of his comments. The perturbation of the country gentlemen among whom he sat, at the economic tendencies of the minister, communicated themselves to Lord Beaconsfield, on whom the idea soon dawned that competition ought to be more and more "regulated," in its application to articles which country gentlemen were concerned in producing. These workings of an uneasy mind were accompanied by the stirrings of an awakened conscience; and Lord Beaconsfield grew more and more sensible of the political immorality of Sir Robert Peel's conduct. Instead of having inherited free-trade principles by legitimate Conservative derivation from Pitt, through Lord Hawkesbury, Mr. Robinson, Mr. Wallace, and Mr. Huskisson, Sir Robert Peel was found to have purloined them from

the Whigs, who had hitherto figured in Mr. Disraeli's speeches as the great antagonists of free-trade, but were now discovered to be its real founders. Sir Robert Peel was charged with having stolen their clothes while they were bathing, with being a great middleman, and, politically, a vast appropriation clause. If free-trade was to be established, Lord Beaconsfield, honouring genius, would prefer to receive it from Mr. Cobden, rather than from one who, though a skilful parliamentary manœuverer, has tampered with the generous confidence of a great people and a great party.

The country gentlemen, however, though preparing to withdraw their confidence from Peel, were not ready to give it to his antagonist, who resolved, therefore, to create a party which should have confidence in him, and the very basis of whose existence should be that confidence. Only very young men, and those not very wise ones, could satisfy these conditions, and out of the materials which they presented to him Lord Beaconsfield formed the Young England party. Of these, the only survivors are Lord John Manners, who is comfortably within the ministerial fold, and Mr. Baillie Cochrane, who wanders disconsolately on

the outside of it. "The atrocious crime of being a young man," to which a great parliamentary orator had at one time indignantly pleaded guilty, became an exalted merit, a sort of supernatural and sacramental grace; and to be told by Sir Robert Peel to serve on railway committees, when you were conscious of a divine summons to serve your country, was little less than a profanity. Only those, however, who have lost their youth value it very highly, and it was natural that a party formed on this basis should be formed and commanded by a middle-aged leader. "We youth," says Falstaff on one occasion; and Lord Beaconsfield parodied him. The recently published memoirs of Lord Strangford show the feelings with which this new intimacy was regarded by the respectable *pères nobles*, to whom the influence which Mr. Disraeli had gained over their sons was a sorrowful perplexity over which they shook their heads and exchanged condolences. The Duke of Rutland deplores to one correspondent the connection of Lord John Manners with Lord Beaconsfield, much as the father of Lord Frederick Verisopht might have lamented his son's addiction to the society of Sir Mulberry Hawk. Young England, however, was merely

a passing fashion or craze, memorable rather in literature than in politics. The necessity of finding some sort of imaginative and intellectual basis for it led Lord Beaconsfield to write his three ablest novels, *Coningsby*, *Sybil*, and *Tancred*, in which his doctrines of Church and State are set forth in blended disquisition and narratives. England was to be saved by its youth, and especially by its aristocratic youth ; almsgiving was to be restored ; young noblemen and gentlemen were to dance with charming female peasants in parks, and to play cricket on village greens with athletic and docile rustics. The direct power of the Crown was to be exercised for the benefit of the people at large, unfettered by a selfish and for the greater part ignoble parvenu oligarchy and a rapacious House of Commons, and the principles of government encouraged by Charles I., the martyr of direct taxation, were to be established once more. The Church was to return to its proper work of diffusing Asian ideas among the flat-nosed Franks. "Is our civilisation a failure?" asks an American poet, "or is the Caucasian played out?" Our civilisation is a failure, Lord Beaconsfield contended, but the Caucasian, the unmixed Caucasian, who in Lord

Beaconsfield's eccentric ethnological nomenclature is the Jew, was only now beginning, in Lord Beaconsfield's person, to play his proper part in English politics. Although the youthful aristocracy and country gentry were to be the instruments of this great restoration, the humble aid of the right-minded manufacturer was not altogether rejected. Milbank is admitted into companionship with Coningsby and Henry Sydney; and Young England, in a body, made a missionary journey to the Manchester Athenæum, and preached the gospel to heathen capitalists and anxiously inquiring clerks and shopkeepers. It is difficult to feel certain whether or not the whole scheme of Young England, political and literary, was a mystification. Lord Beaconsfield's most fantastic notions are apparently his most genuine beliefs. His practical politics are but the accommodations of an Eastern mind and character to the habits of the foreign country in which he lives. Young England, however, was but a passing dream from which Mr. Disraeli soon awoke. Coningsby attached himself to the traitor and miscreant Peel, and became his Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. The growing distrust felt towards the Prime Minister, as

he pursued his liberalising course in economic policy, made a Protectionist party possible, and to its formation Mr. Disraeli addressed himself.

His alliance for this purpose with Lord George Bentinck is one of the most curious incidents of his career. Lord George Bentinck was everything which up to a recent period Lord Beaconsfield had denounced. He was, as Lord Beaconsfield himself records, by descent and in political connection, a Whig of 1689. He held to the old-fashioned Whig notions of toleration, and voted, at the risk of forfeiting his newly won leadership, for the emancipation of the Jews on grounds of religious freedom, and, not with Lord Beaconsfield, on grounds of religious truth. He had a strong jealousy of that influence of the Court which Lord Beaconsfield would augment at the expense of the power of Parliament. He held those Protectionist doctrines in commerce to which Lord Beaconsfield was now a professing convert, but which a few years ago he had stigmatized as a part of the selfish policy of the Whig aristocracy. But though he loved Protection much, he hated Peel more; and of this feeling common to him with the majority of the Conservative country gentlemen, Lord Beacons-

field condescended to make himself the organ. He barbed and winged the heavy arrows of their malice, and gave literary force to their uncouth and inarticulate spite.

The language which Mr. Disraeli had for most of his life used with respect to Peel, his elaborate justification of the doctrines of free trade as the true and traditional Tory policy, and his defence of Peel's principle of opportunism and accommodation to circumstances as the essential condition of modern statesmanship, have been already spoken of. It was competent to Lord Beaconsfield to alter his opinions on these points, if he had any opinions to alter, and if he had a sufficient motive for doing so. But, apart from the character of the person assuming to be a censor, it was not within his moral right to stigmatize conduct which with full knowledge he had eulogised, and principles of political casuistry which he himself had set forth. This *ex post facto* condemnation of things once approved, assumes that they had acquired from the personal vindictiveness of the assailant an unworthiness which did not originally or intrinsically belong to them. To accusations of political treason to his party, accusations which Lord Bea-

consfield had himself elaborately refuted in advance, were added imputations indescribably base of personal untruthfulness and treachery in Peel's treatment of Canning. The dull mind of Lord George Bentinck was probably not aware of the wrong he was doing. Lord Beaconsfield cannot accept this excuse; and his own keen pleasure in the pain which he inflicted on Peel was obvious to every one who listened night after night to his attacks. Patriotism and the charity which sinks its personal feelings in a passion for the public good have perhaps reached their highest expression in the spectacle, which has been exhibited during the present year, of the son of Sir Robert Peel, the inheritor of his name and his title, protesting his unbounded confidence in Lord Beaconsfield, and rallying opinion to his support in the House of Commons and on demagogic platforms. The ties of blood and the memory of unexampled outrage are as nothing compared with a constraining sense of public duty. The repeal of the Corn Laws was followed by the defeat of Sir Robert Peel on the Irish Coercion Bill, through a coalition of Whigs and Protectionists. A Liberal Government presided over by Lord John Russell succeeded.

We have seen that it was as the disciple of Sir Robert Peel that Lord Beaconsfield found his way into the Parliaments of 1837 and 1841. It was as his assailant that he made his first step to the position which he now occupies. Yet it may be said with truth that Lord Beaconsfield's estimate of the man has never changed. He always recognised in him precisely the same qualities, eulogising them at one moment as marks of the most consummate statesmanship, and at another as proofs of the meanest peddling in politics. Some of the sentences in which he denounced or ridiculed Peel are worth quoting: "When I examine the career of this minister, which has now filled a great space in the parliamentary history of this country, I find that for between thirty and forty years, from the days of Horner to the days of the honourable member for Stockport (Mr. Cobden), the right honourable gentleman has traded on the ideas and intelligence of others." Perhaps we may say in parentheses that this is better than trading on their want of ideas and their absence of intelligence, as later Conservative statesmen have done. "His life has been one great appropriation clause. He is a burglar of others' intellect. Search the

index of Beatson from the days of the Conqueror to the termination of the last reign, there is no statesman who has committed political petty larceny on so great a scale." The most striking instance of this petty larceny is well known. "The right honourable gentleman caught the Whigs bathing, and walked away with their clothes. He has left them in the full enjoyment of their Liberal position, and he is himself a strict Conservative of their garments." Again: "Something has risen up in this country as fatal in the political world as it has been in the landed world of Ireland—we have a great parliamentary middleman. It is well known what a middle-man is. He is a man who bamboozles one party and plunders the other, till, having obtained a position to which he is not entitled, he cries out, 'Let us have no party questions, but fixity of tenure.'" Against this degradation of statesmanship Mr. Disraeli protested in lofty moral tones. "While we are admitting," he said, "the principles of relaxed commerce, there is extreme danger of our admitting the principles of relaxed politics. I advise, therefore, that we all, whatever may be our opinion about free trade, oppose the introduction of free politics. Let men

stand by the principles by which they rise, right or wrong. I make no exception. If they be in the wrong, they must retire to that shade of private life with which our present rulers have often threatened us." "My conception of a great statesman is of one who represents a great idea—an idea which may lead him to power, an idea with which he may identify himself, an idea which he may develope, an idea which he may and can impress on the mind and conscience of the nation. That, sir, is my notion of a great statesman. I do not care whether he be a manufacturer or a manufacturer's son. But I care not what may be the position of a man who never originates an idea, a watcher of the atmosphere, a man who, as he says, takes his observations, and when he finds the wind in a certain quarter turns to suit it. Such a person may be a powerful minister, but he is no more a great statesman than the man who gets up behind a carriage is a great whip."

There is much more to the same effect. Lord Beaconsfield has always been a master of the art of saying the same thing in many different ways. These citations are perhaps among the best examples that could be furnished of that very peculiar intellectual

product, House of Commons wit. "Scotch wit" has passed into a proverb, as an example of what logicians call the *contradictio in adjecto*, the adjective qualifying the substantive much as in the case of German silver, or (to be quite impartial) Britannia metal, or Brummagem plate are qualified. In like manner House of Commons wit simulates the sort of thing which is called wit in other connections, without really being so. It is generally recognisable by the "laughter" which the reporters kindly append to its recorded utterance. Lord Beaconsfield has always been a master in the production of this commodity, and he sometimes gives the genuine thing. This is a digression. We shall speak of him afterwards as a parliamentary orator. What we are now concerned with is his theory of statesmanship. If he had been contrasting the higher and the lower orders of statesmanship, little exception could be taken to his doctrine. Peel certainly was not a statesman of the first rank. He was not an originator. If he had been, he probably would not have been a politician; he certainly would not have been a Minister of State in England. He might have been a professor, a writer of books, or an agitator, but he would never

have been an official statesman. The closest approach which any one has made in modern times to Lord Beaconsfield's idea of statesmanship was made by Mazzini, whom Lord Beaconsfield would probably deny to be a statesman at all. He, if any one ever did, represented an idea, not indeed an idea which led him to power, in the sense in which Lord Beaconsfield understands power, since it doomed him to imprisonment, exile, and poverty. Still it was one which he impressed on the mind and conscience of his country, with which he indentified himself, and which he developed. In Lord Beaconsfield's sense, Mazzini was a greater statesman than Cavour. In the same sense, Burke was a statesman when he raged in prophetic fury against the French Revolution, carrying the national feeling with him in his frenzy, but not when he framed and carried his scheme of economic reform. Cobden, as a free-trader, was a statesman and Peel was not. Mr. Bright, in his agitation for household suffrage, showed a statesmanship which Lord Beaconsfield did not display in passing the bill for which that agitation prepared the way and created the necessity. The fact probably is that statesmanship, as a merely practical

art, does not deserve the high intellectual rank sometimes assigned to it. Original ideas are out of place in it. The statesman in modern times and in quiet days is four or five removes from originality. This was so with Peel. The originator, so far as English theory and practice is concerned, of sound economic ideas was Adam Smith. Between him and Sir Robert Peel, popular exponents of economic doctrine, such as Bastiat in France, and Colonel Perronet Thompson in England, authors of *Economic Sophisms* and *Catechisms of Free Trade*, have first to be interposed. But they are only the first link in the chain. Then came the popular agitation of Cobden and Bright, and the Parliamentary advocacy of Mr. Villiers. Last in the chain, and dragged along by it, conquered rather than conquering, comes the successful Minister with whose name the hardly-won reform is associated. The discoverer, the expositor, the agitator, the Parliamentary leader — educated opinion, popular opinion, House of Commons opinion, and ministerial conversion or apostasy—two words for the same thing looked at with hostile or friendly eyes—these are the stages by which a vital political idea struggles into realisation. To complain

that a statesman does not originate is to utter treason against the doctrine of the division of labour. He simply delivers the article that others have made. If Sir Robert Peel had originated anything in theory, he would probably have failed directly to accomplish anything in practice. He would have been Adam Smith and not Sir Robert Peel. He was the convert, the honest convert, of public opinion. His mind by a sort of pre-established harmony was so constituted as to see what ought to be done just when the moment for doing it had arrived, but not a moment too soon nor a moment too late. Such an intelligence is not of the highest order. But it is useful in the conduct of life. The proper contrast is not that which Lord Beaconsfield draws between the adapting and adopting statesman and the originator ; but between the statesman who gives effect to tardy and yet timely convictions, and the trading politician who resists measures which he knows in his heart to be just and expedient in order to humour a faction or tc gratify personal spite and ambition. The Conservative party has within a generation had leaders of both sorts. It is worth noting by those who think that in politics we still have judgment here, that Sir Robert

Peel died an exile from his party, distrusted and hated by them; and that Lord Beaconsfield is able to boast of unwavering majorities in both Houses, of the confidence of the Crown, and of the enthusiastic support of the mobs and music halls which he supposes to represent the country.

IV.

From 1852 to August, 1878.

The sensible public is never blinded by the vulgar glitter of stars and garters. Wise Frenchmen saw behind the splendour of the Tuileries the Man of December, and waited for Mexico and Sedan. Englishmen with good memories see under this new blue riband the political bravo who struck at Peel. The scenic effects have undoubtedly been good. Not satisfied with his triumphs on the domestic stage, Lord Beaconsfield was ambitious of performing a great part on foreign boards. To add to the theatric effect, he was attended, as the Court Circular says of royal personages and their humble companions, by the Marquis of Salisbury. This strange companionship has been one of the small surprises of the day. In an amusing passage in one of his speeches, Lord Beaconsfield accounted for the practice of twofold parliamentary representation. Two

members, according to him, were chosen, because neither dared go alone. They travelled together, because they were afraid of robbers; they slept in the same room, because they were afraid of ghosts. We forget whether he added that each went to keep an eye on the other, whom he distrusted. Possibly Lord Beaconsfield and Lord Salisbury have been associated on the principle which is said in the Roman Catholic Church to require that members of certain religious orders shall work and travel in pairs, so as to give an external guarantee for zeal and good behaviour. With the recollection of the things said and done by Lord Salisbury in Constantinople, Lord Beaconsfield may not have been prepared to trust his colleague out of his sight. In the presence of the Prime Minister the Foreign Secretary could be only in name a Plenipotentiary.

By remaining in the Cabinet, after the retirement of Lord Carnarvon and Lord Derby, Lord Salisbury has probably secured for himself the reversion of the Premiership. To rise very high, he has stooped very low, and he may find it necessary to stoop lower yet. He has apparently adopted to the full those ethics of political adventure which he once denounced in the

bitterest and the most scornful language, and in which he foresaw the degradation of English public life through the lowering of the character of English public men. In the controversy which followed his secession from Lord Derby's administration in 1867, he pointed to the character and conduct of Lord Beaconsfield as of evil omen for England. Lord Beaconsfield smiled then; he has better reason for smiling now. The bitter assailant has become the humble disciple; the scandalized moralist has been the adroit abettor and imitator. The legerdemain of the secret agreement with Russia, balanced by the secret convention with Turkey, was not a combination of a very high intellectual order; but it showed a superiority to moral scruples, to which happily it is difficult to find a parallel in English diplomacy. The British Plenipotentiaries at the Congress were playing with cards in their sleeves. Lord Salisbury has acquired Lord Beaconsfield's art of answering, using words in a double sense, one intended to reassure his hearers at the moment; the other, when the trick comes to light, to furnish a justification for himself. His denial of dissensions in the Cabinet, and his repudiation of the *Globe* copy of the Anglo-Russian

agreement, were conveyed in words which meant one thing to him and another to his hearers. His contradiction of Lord Derby's statement as to his motives in quitting office requires to be taken, therefore, with the greatest reserve. Henceforward, indeed, Lord Salisbury's statements will need an interpretation clause, such as is found in acts of parliament, determining that such and such a term shall be taken in such and such a meaning. Lord Salisbury has made a sacrifice of political character to his political fortunes. He will probably find before long that even from the point of view of personal ambition only, he has made a mistake which it will take many years to repair. The trick played upon the Congress by the two secret agreements with Russia and Turkey is, however, less censurable than the trick played through the same instruments upon England herself. The nation has been committed to a task not simply difficult and dangerous,—difficulty and danger may be confronted and overcome,—but to obligations which it is impossible to discharge. England and Turkey have been drawing bills upon each other, which cannot be paid, and offering them to Europe as good security. The protectorate over Asia Minor,

of which the occupation of Cyprus is simply one of the conditions, is a piece of gigantic charlatanism. Lord Beaconsfield's triumphant entry into London, and the theatrical procession from Charing Cross, was a bit of harlequinade from which, one would have thought, the self-respect and reserve of an English statesman and gentleman would have shrunk. Neither Lord Beaconsfield nor Lord Salisbury showed any shrinking. A troop of horse-riders visits a country town much in the same way, and endeavours to bring idlers to its booth, as Lord Beaconsfield tried to manage public opinion. The whole thing was mountebank to the last degree ; but it was not the less in harmony with the career of the Cagliostro-Chatham who was its principal figure. Lord Salisbury was a secondary figure in the parade. To some who, on the 16th of July, observed him sitting in the same carriage with Lord Beaconsfield, and humbly taking the dregs of mob applause after his chief had drained the cup, Sydney Herbert's indignant scorn may have recurred ; and they may have applied to Lord Salisbury the remarks which he addressed to Mr. Disraeli sitting on the Treasury Bench, and professing a free-trade policy,—"If a

man wants to see humiliation, which God knows is always a painful sight, he needs but look there."

The apologists for Lord Beaconsfield may, however, plead excuses for him, which cannot be urged on behalf of Lord Salisbury. One of the earliest critics of *Vanity Fair* suggested a parallel which must have occurred to many other people. "If Becky could have changed sexes with her husband, all would have gone well. She might have canvassed a borough as a Radical, and a county as a Tory; might have gained the ear of the House by malignity, and kept it by effrontery; might have risen into notoriety by attacking the first men of the age, and become the leader of a party by joining one which all persons of sense had deserted." In one most important respect, Lord Beaconsfield was more fortunate than his feminine counterpart. His Jos. Sedley and Rawdon Crawley periods, his coquettings with young England and Protectionist boobies, had a sequel to which there is nothing corresponding in the social adventures of Miss Becky Sharp. His alliance with Lord Derby (to speak in terms derived from the vicissitudes of the other sex) made a respectable man of Mr. Disraeli. Henceforth he was re-

ceived into the purest and most virtuous society. A veil was drawn over the past, and no curious inquiries were to be made.

The death of Lord George Bentinck, in 1848, made Lord Beaconsfield the real leader of the Protectionist faction; and his acceptance by the late Lord Derby, then the head of the Tory party, made him, after Peel's death, the conservative leader in the House of Commons. This officious position became official with his appointment, in 1852, as Chancellor of the Exchequer in Lord Derby's first administration. Though Lord Beaconsfield has three times held this office, no one has ever thought of him as a minister of finance. He was Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1852, in 1857, and in 1866, because it was necessary that, as ministerial leader in the House of Commons, he should hold one of the great offices of State, and because this particular office was the only one which it suited the royal pleasure that Lord Beaconsfield at that time should hold. The usage which made it necessary that one of the Secretaries of State should be the minister in attendance upon the Queen, was in force when Lord Derby formed his first administration in 1852; and the objection of the Queen to have

Lord Beaconsfield as one of the ministers in attendance upon her was, there is good ground for believing, the reason for his appointment to the almost ludicrously unsuitable office of Chancellor of the Exchequer. Lord Beaconsfield was a finance minister who never affected to know or care much about finance; and having mastered his budgets sufficiently to make the opening statement with credit, left the details to be fought out by Secretaries of the Treasury and other statistical persons—the calculating boys of the Government, who had a shopkeeper's acquaintance with Cocker and his rules. The sublime indifference with which Lord Beaconsfield used to look on, or scarcely to look on at these encounters, but rather to detach himself in apparently profound reveries from the details of the department of which he was the responsible head, will be remembered by all who knew the House of Commons during his Chancellorship. *Dux sum et super arithmeticam*—"I am the leader of the House of Commons, and have nothing to do with figures"—was a sentiment impressed on his whole attitude and bearing. The inconvenient limitation upon freedom of ministerial arrangements, of which we have spoken, and consequent hindrance to the efficient con-

duct of public business, exist no longer. But there were compensations. If the old usage had been departed from earlier, Lord Beaconsfield's decisive influence on the conduct of public affairs would possibly have been anticipated by some twenty years or so. The first condition of Lord Beaconsfield's success is that he has been a devoted leader. For more than a quarter of a century he has given himself up to the service of the Conservative party, abandoning his whole mind and energies to them, and making a sacrifice of literary taste and ambition and social leisure to the task which he had undertaken. He has not tried to serve two masters. He has acknowledged no conflict between a higher and a lower law. The virtue which he has shown is not the highest, nor is the recompense which he has reaped the noblest. But the one is appropriate to the other. He has been a vigilant and faithful party leader, and he has reaped a vigilant and faithful party leader's reward. His minutest attention has been given to everything which could keep his followers together. Youthful aspirants have been flattered and encouraged; disappointed vanities have been soothed, and elderly ambitions have been satisfied. Mr. Gladstone has had higher

aims and has done a nobler work than Lord Beaconsfield; but he neglected the ordinary arts of party management while he was Prime Minister, and threw up the leadership when he grew tired of it. The mere party feeling which the two men excite, reflects the faults of the greater and better man, and the merits of the lower mind and character; and in both cases is natural and inevitable. The qualities which have helped the one and hindered the other in Parliament and the world, may possibly have had corresponding effects at Court. Whatever Lord Beaconsfield's gifts, it is only since the retirement of the late Lord Derby, and his own appointment to the Premiership ten years ago, that he has had the opportunity of practising them at Windsor and Balmoral. His doctrines of the personal power of the monarch, and his or her place and work in the constitution, are naturally acceptable to holders and expectants of the royal office; and there is some truth probably in the current opinion that, since he has been First Minister of the Crown, the sovereign and the heir apparent have played a larger part in public business, and especially in the control of foreign policy, than at any period since the reign of George III. Lord Beaconsfield is not the

man, like George Grenville, and perhaps later ministers, to be wearisome and dictatorial in the royal closet, and to present the decisions of the Cabinet as edicts to be registered in a royal bed of justice. The power of the sovereign has been revived and aggrandized under his direction. In any future contrasts which may be drawn between constitutional monarchy in England and the Republican system, it may be desirable to keep in mind that the former is not necessarily as pure an example of government by Cabinet government—that is to say, by a committee of both Houses, responsible to the elected Chamber—as it has of late been assumed to be.

Lord Beaconsfield's influence in debate is due, in part, to the qualities which we have described, and is certainly not owing to that business-like directness and knowledge of affairs which it is customary to represent as the essential conditions, in our times, of authority in the House of Commons. As a parliamentary orator, he may claim the verdict of success. There is no man who is more to the taste of both Houses, whose rising has always been hailed with more expectant curiosity, who is rewarded with closer attention, and who is greeted with prompter laughter

and applause, with that gathering and swelling murmur of cheers which is to the parliamentary speaker what the sound of meeting palms is to the actor. Yet Lord Beaconsfield is by no means an ideal orator. Mechanism, and not life, characterizes his speaking. Vivian Grey, in reviewing his resources for playing the part of a political impostor, counts as the principal among them that he "can perform right skilfully upon that most splendid of musical instruments—the human voice." Lord Beaconsfield's voice is a powerful and delicate organ, capable of almost all tones and inflexions; but it is an instrument on which an external artist appears to be performing, pulling out the stops, and putting down the pedals, and pressing the keys. So with his gestures; they are often vehement and excited, but they are always angular and stiff. Somebody seems to be jerking strings or wires, with more or less force and skill. There is a game which children are fond of seeing played, in which two persons are concealed behind a curtain, the head of one and the arms of the other only appearing. The head declaims and the arms gesticulate as nearly in harmony as may be, or with as ridiculous an incongruity as can be devised. Lord Beaconsfield's voice and gestures never

seem to be in much closer relation to each other than those of the composite orator of the children's game. You never, as with Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Bright, see the whole man, thought, feeling, voice, and frame, fused into a single expression of the ruling mood or idea. Instead of losing the parts in the whole, the whole seems always with Lord Beaconsfield to be resolving itself into its parts. There is no nature, there is not even consummate art, which is but the most perfect and careful expression of nature; but there is very dexterous artifice, and you are pleased, as with the exhibition of a difficult and cleverly-executed trick. The interest which Lord Beaconsfield's speeches excite and repay is that of a public entertainment. He is essentially a comedian.

The descriptions which are from time to time given of him proceed upon this assumption, often unconsciously made, of his real character in public life. We are told, as if an opera singer was in question, that on such and such an occasion he was in capital voice, and his make-up is criticized, or rather described, with admiring particularity. As to the substance of his speeches, they present the same characteristic of parts not fused into a whole, which

is exhibited in his manner. Dazzling ornaments, precious stones or painted glass, diamonds or paste, are strung together on a piece of common twine. When Lord Beaconsfield has to make a long exposition or a protracted argument, nothing can be drearier; he has seldom mastered his subject as a whole, and he does not put it clearly before the House. In his financial statements and in his Reform Bill speeches, and on nearly every occasion on which he has had to place a complicated topic before parliament at the opening of the debate, Lord Beaconsfield was evidently speaking from cram, like a counsel who has hurriedly read his brief, and relies upon his juniors and his solicitors. A casual objection or inquiry which interrupted the thread of his prepared statements is, or was—for in the House of Lords Lord Beaconsfield seldom undertakes work of this sort—met with a joke or with a reference of the objector to some future occasion. Mr. Gladstone, on the other hand, in being the absolute master of details, is in turn occasionally mastered by them. They assume, now and then, a magnitude before his mind which is out of proportion to the whole subject, and which is checked only by his equal knowledge of all

other details. Lord Beaconsfield never masters details, but he is never mastered by them, simply because he leaves them alone, dexterously dodging them and slipping by on the other side.

In this fact is the secret of some portion of Lord Beaconsfield's success as a ministerial leader, and of Mr. Gladstone's partial failure. Mr. Gladstone has, almost always apparently, known a great deal more about the business of every department than the head of it did, and has been more intimately acquainted with every bill than the ministerial colleague who has had charge of it. He hears a blundering exposition, or a lame defence, with the intellectual impatience of a master who sees a good cause weakened, or a bad cause made gratuitously worse instead of better, in the handling. He interposes, usually very effectually, so far as the mere argument is concerned, to set matters right. The result is sometimes to raise a secondary or third-rate question into primary importance, to make a small ministerial crisis out of the ordinary incidents of legislation and debate, and to decide by convincing arguments issues which might reasonably have been left to a conclusive majority. Having the better cause, Mr. Gladstone cannot bear

to seem to have the worse. It wounds him that good arguments which his colleagues have not known how to employ should be allowed to rust unused. His colleagues, who do not know that their arguments are bad, and who think probably that they have made out an unanswerable case, do not like to see the honour of victory snatched out of their hands. They are prone to believe that they have persuaded the majority which was created for them beforehand. This is an innocent illusion, at which it would have been charitable to wink. The too ruthless destruction of it has done something to prevent Mr. Gladstone's having any devoted personal following in Parliament, or even any very strong political friendships on the front Liberal bench. Lord Beaconsfield has never in this way unconsciously wounded the self-love of the people who sit about him. He has been patient of bad arguments when he has had a good majority, and he has been willing to leave his lieutenants masters of the field and with the honours of victory. If a colleague has got into a scrape, from which a division will extricate him, he has been content to let him fight his way out of it without tendering humiliating and distasteful assistance; thus saving

the complacency of a friend, and not too closely associating the ministry as a whole, in the person of its chief, with the blunder of a department.

Lord Beaconsfield has said that a ministerial leader ought to be reluctant to speak, and, if such a happy gift could be hoped for, unable to speak. He himself can always intervene when it is necessary, rather indeed to divert the attention of the House by badinage or invective from strong arguments, than to convert them by arguments yet stronger. But he is never tempted to speak by his superior knowledge of the subject in debate, or by that excessive facility in giving rhetorical form to the suggestions and impulses of the moment, which is often as fatal to the highest eloquence as it is dangerous in parliamentary management. Oratory, after all, is an instrumental art; and in the English House of Commons, as it is now constituted, it is a means for the conduct of public business. Probably no one has ever used it so effectively for this purpose as Mr. Gladstone. The growing perplexity of public affairs, in which every question is involved in a web of tangled details, demanded, and, perhaps, in a certain degree created, at any rate it stimulated and developed, that

particular type of statesmanship and of eloquence of which Mr. Gladstone is a master. He is at his strongest and best as a legislator in arranging complicated details into an orderly whole—as in his greater budgets and in the Irish Church and Land Bills ; and his eloquence reflects his statesmanship in his power of lucid exposition and arrangement of facts and topics which probably no other man could carry in his head, or bring out in perfect order and completeness in speech. Mr. Gladstone's easy movement through a crowd and crush of embarrassing topics, his copious, unfaltering, and unstrained speech, mark the man who is at home with every branch of his subject—who knows the smallest minutiæ of it, in themselves, in their relation to each other, and to the whole. In the laboured and stilted English of what should be the level parts of Lord Beaconsfield's speeches—the Johnsonese vocabulary and the Holofernian diction—you see traces of a man labouring in matters with which he is not familiar. The pedestrian speech of Lord Beaconsfield does not suggest easy advance upon a smooth and fair high road, but a toilsome stumbling up a rough and barren hillside. The dreariness of the way is relieved by piquant para-

doxes and pungent personal satire, and the expectation of these keeps attention alive, or stimulates it when it is flagging. Lord Beaconsfield's reputation as an orator will depend in the future, as it does now, on isolated sentences or short passages admitting of separation from the speeches in which they are found, because they have in reality no vital connection with them. They are ornaments stuck on or purple patches let into a sometimes threadbare robe. Lord Beaconsfield's oratorical ability will probably in future be rated higher than it deserves, because of this facility of detachment. He has converted his intellectual wealth into portable property, as peasants abroad invest their savings in golden ear-rings and bracelets, or as Eastern merchants carry theirs in diamonds and precious stones. Mr. Gladstone's eloquence will be to future generations rather a tradition of parliamentary history than a continued life. It is not to be judged by extracts. Each part of his speech depends on the whole, and each speech, we may almost say, on the discussion of which it formed usually the most important element. Mr. Gladstone's oratory is that of the man of affairs, the statesman, in the true sense of the term,

and is imbedded in the public business of the time. Lord Beaconsfield's oratory consists of the sallies of a fashionable entertainer, and his cleverer hits and repartees may have a sort of jest-book immortality, along with the best things of Foote and Theodore Hook. Nothing can be better than his nicknames. There is something of genius in them. The "superior person"—the "inspired schoolboy"—and the "extinct volcanoes," of the Liberal front bench, have been named and labelled once for all. The House of Commons misses these things, and such stories as that of the Irish deputation who waited upon Lord Beaconsfield, and after a very agreeable and cordial interview, went away without telling him what they had come for. His withdrawal has eclipsed its gaiety. Lord Beaconsfield has found it easier to communicate some of his least desirable moral qualities to his colleagues in both Houses, than his intellectual vivacity. There are traces of the master in the disingenuousness with which Sir Stafford Northcote and Lord Salisbury have learned to answer questions, using words formally true to convey a misleading impression.

The year which saw Lord Beaconsfield for the first

time a minister of the Crown was otherwise even more memorable. By a curious coincidence it witnessed the the death of the Duke of Wellington, and the restoration of the French empire under Napoleon III. It fell to Lord Beaconsfield, on behalf of her Majesty's Government, to announce in the House of Commons the Queen's recognition, as Emperor of the French, of the friend and fellow-adventurer who had been enigmatically silent, and daringly paradoxical with him at Gore House. The era of blunder and swagger and national Chauvinism, of tawdry and flashy Government, which Napoleon III. introduced in France, Lord Beaconsfield more than twenty years afterwards was to initiate in England. Lord Beaconsfield has consciously imitated Napoleon III. and the Second Empire in his methods of government; but for a long time he unconsciously produced a nearer resemblance to Soulouque II. and the Empire of Hayti. The French Empire was a powerful though pestilent reality. Lord Beaconsfield, until he devised the British protectorate of Asiatic Turkey, was unable to commit the country to anything more than whimsical and irritating extravagancies. He has abundantly made up for post-

poned opportunity. On the very day on which the House of Commons heard the ministerial statement of the recognition of Napoleon, it, with a sort of ironical appropriateness, voted a large sum of money for the solemn interment of the Duke of Wellington. It buried one era before entering upon another; and Lord Beaconsfield was the man to officiate at both ceremonies. It fell to him, in the name of the Commons of England, to pronounce the national farewell to its great hero. How he did it, it is almost superfluous to say. Lord Beaconsfield could not find words of his own suitable to the occasion, and he availed himself of the language in which M. Thiers had commended the services of some second-rate French marshal; without, however, mentioning either M. Thiers or the French marshal.

That Lord Beaconsfield was not lifted into sincerity when he assumed to speak of the dead Duke of Wellington in the name of the Commons of England, gives a glimpse of the way in which use and habit may degrade a nature not originally without generosity and sensibility. Perhaps, however, Lord Beaconsfield did not think that the Duke of Wellington deserved more than the second-hand praises in which

a second-rate French marshal had been posthumously dressed out. His estimate of the Duke and of what he calls Dukism, has been given in one of his writings, and it is by no means of a very exalted order.

Lord Derby's first ministry purchased a few weeks' tenure of office after the general election of 1852, by accepting the resolution which pledged them to the theory and practice of free trade. But Lord Beaconsfield's first budget was more than even the contemptuous indulgence of the House of Commons could bear. The coalition ministry of Lord Aberdeen, which brought Whigs, Peelites, and Radicals into the same Cabinet and the same party, followed. The history of the next two-and-twenty years is, with little interruption, the history of Liberal government in England, with which Lord Beaconsfield had nothing to do except as a sharp, but unavailing critic. His political adventures may be said to cease for a time at this point; for henceforth he acted for and with his party, and they share with him the responsibility for the things said and done in their name. The much-vaunted chivalry of the late Lord Derby had its full share in the exploits of the politician with whom he entered

into partnership, and whom he designated as his successor when broken health dictated his retirement from office. Through the greater part of a quarter of a century Lord Beaconsfield was the patient and wary leader of the Opposition. In debate he was a sort of railing and vituperative chorus in a drama the action of which was carried on by others than himself. The six years which intervened between Lord Beaconsfield's first and second tenure of office, derive their historic importance from the financial measures of Mr. Gladstone, from the Crimean War, from the establishment of relations of friendship with France (which has outlasted and, it is reasonable to hope, will outlast the unworthy instrument and motives in which it originated), and the Indian mutiny. Lord Beaconsfield renewed against Lord Aberdeen, though with more reserve and with some sense of his own changed position and ex-official dignity, the bitter and unscrupulous attacks which he had made some years before on Sir Robert Peel. He opposed with epigrams the development of that free-trade policy which he and his party, by their own votes and speeches, on Mr. Villiers's resolution in 1852, were pledged to carry out. He subjected himself, by his

criticisms on the diplomatic conduct by the Government of the Eastern Question, to the imputation of factious and unpatriotic motives, which during the past two years have been flung at the head of Mr. Gladstone; and when the Indian mutiny broke out, he answered the question "Ought India to be content?" in a manner which might have subjected him to the threat of a vote of personal censure, if any Liberal Mr. Hanbury had at that time sat on the Ministerial side of the House. It is curious that in the debate in 1854, on the unconstitutional interference attributed to the Prince Consort, Lord Beaconsfield, though as leader of the Opposition he might naturally, and it would have been thought must necessarily, have spoken, left it to Mr. Walpole to express the concurrence of the Conservative party in the doubtful doctrines laid down by Lord John Russell. In 1852, when Lord Palmerston was dismissed from office, Lord Beaconsfield had strongly censured the frequent and improper introduction by Lord John Russell of the Queen's name into the controversy. In so doing, he was consistent with his vindication, many years before, of Sir Robert Peel's conduct in the Bed-chamber affair; but he was inconsistent with

the general tone of both his earlier and his later writings on the functions and power of the Sovereign in the constitution, and with his own practice since he has held the office of Prime Minister.

Defeated in 1857 on the Conspiracy Bill, Lord Palmerston, who in 1855 had succeeded Lord Aberdeen, resigned, and Lord Derby and Lord Beaconsfield returned to office. The attempt to govern by a minority in the House of Commons, which Sir Robert Peel had made in 1834, and which Lord Derby had repeated in 1852, was now renewed, with no more success than it deserved. The only measure of importance passed by the administration was the Act for the transfer of the government of India from the East India Company to the Crown. The confusion of bills and resolutions, and of bills No. 1, No. 2, and No. 3, had scarcely any precedent in legislation; and it had no parallel until Lord Derby and Lord Beaconsfield had to deal with the Reform question in 1867. The fantastic scheme of the Government, which apparently proceeded from the same curiously constructed intellect as Lord Beaconsfield's only original budget, and as the first Reform Bill of 1867, was transformed into a reasonable and possible meas-

ure by the Opposition, and accepted by the Government and the nation at their hands.

In the meantime, since the conclusion of the Crimean War, and the signature in 1856 of the Treaty of Paris, home questions had begun to reassume their importance. England returning from her perhaps Quixotic enterprises abroad, had begun to see the necessity of cultivating her own fields; and it was doubtful whether the instruments in her hand afforded the best means of doing so. The political machinery needed improving. In other words, parliamentary reform was a necessity which politicians of all parties, Liberal and Conservative, Radical, Whig, and Tory, had to confront. The Act of 1832 had ceased to be in harmony with the England in which in 1858 men had for some time been living. Those ingenious writers who are always engaged in a lively protest alike against Radical reforms, and Whig or doctrinaire tampering with the constitution, and who demand a settlement which shall last, fail to understand not only the world, but in a more conspicuous degree still the country in which they live. In China, political ingenuity has succeeded in producing a settlement which has, in its main features, lasted

for some thousands of years ; but even the Chinese, appropriately worshipping their ancestors, have not absolutely succeeded. Death, in truth, is the only settlement which lasts. One of our Chinese politicians represented Lord John Russell as arguing : "I was very hungry ; I had a hearty dinner which did me good, and I must, therefore, now dine again." This philosopher apparently considered that one dinner in a lifetime ought to satisfy any one ; and that having dined to-day it would be absurd and a wanton tampering with one's constitution to think of dining to-morrow. The languid Administration of Lord John Russell owed its feebleness in some degree to the inefficiency of the men of whom it was composed, but in a greater degree to the fact that the constituencies which the Act of 1832 had created, no longer represented the country. Between the industrial England and the social England of that day a great and wide gulf had arisen. The Chartist movement of 1848 was a symptom of that divergence. That was an inarticulate outburst which lacked reasonable guidance and interpretation. The handful of men in Parliament who perceived the real state of affairs, and endeavoured to discover and apply a timely rem-

edy, were described as factious innovators, bent on revolution and destruction for the pleasure of the thing. The respectable Mr. Hume was denounced by the Liberal leader of the day as a chartered libertine. The fact is that the men who were bent upon improvement were the first to perceive the insufficiency of the parliamentary machinery for accomplishing it. Even to the last the men who were the unwilling and humiliated instruments of the enfranchisement of 1867, proclaimed that the necessity which they obeyed was entirely factitious in its origin, the result of party manœuvres and personal ambitions, and not the expression of any real demand on the part of the country. The Reform Bills unsuccessfully introduced by Lord John Russell, during his own Administration and that of Lord Aberdeen, were rather attempts to abate what was considered a nuisance within the walls of Parliament, and to buy off Mr. Hume and Mr. Bright, than dictated by a sense of political justice and expediency in any large sense. The same may be said of the Bill brought forward by Lord Beaconsfield in 1859. It was argued, almost in so many words, that the popular indifference gave a good opportunity of effecting ostensible changes

which should in reality change nothing. Lord Beaconsfield's Reform Bill did change something. It changed the Government. It is unnecessary to describe the fantastic provisions of that ludicrous scheme, which was destroyed by its own absurdities and eccentricities. Lord Beaconsfield has always denounced the the Reform Act of 1832 as a retrogressive and anti-democratic measure. His idea of Tory democracy is government by the Crown or the aristocracy through the residuum, to use the phrase which Mr. Bright introduced into our political vocabulary. The old freemen were precisely such a residuum as he needed. It is true that during the whole of the agitation, in and out of Parliament, he deprecated what he called the degradation of the franchise, and argued for its lateral as opposed to its vertical extension. But when Lord Salisbury, then sitting in the House of Commons as Lord Cranborne, denounced the inconsistency of these professions with the Reform Bill of 1867, in its final shape, Lord Beaconsfield appealed to the fact, which he challenged his antagonist to verify by reference to still living witnesses, that in the deliberations of successive cabinets he had always advocated a household qualification as the only solid

ground on which the franchise could rest. Lord Beaconsfield is occasionally in the habit of making strong statements based on what turns out afterwards to be an imperfect recollection. But there is no improbability in this assertion. If a man's consistency is to be judged solely by comparing the beginning and the end of his career, Lord Beaconsfield might be accounted one of the most consistent of politicians. But there is an intervening space, occupying the greater part, and the most decisively influential part, of his career; and that cannot be left out of the reckoning.

The charge which is made against Lord Beaconsfield is that for long periods he has persistently denied convictions which he all along steadily held. It is quite probable that he has always been as much of a free-trader as he was when, more than fifty years ago, he published *Popanilla*, a work the very existence of which he forgot, as we pointed out in a former article, when he wrote the preface to the new edition of *Lothair*, but which since has been brought to his memory and included in the most recently issued volume of his collected works. Nevertheless, this did not prevent his assailing Sir Robert Peel and

assuming the leadership of the Protectionist party. He may have advocated household suffrage in the Cabinet, but he denounced it in Parliament as involving peril and degradation. His Reform Bill of 1859, which contained no provision for lowering the franchise in boroughs, was defeated on a resolution of Lord John Russell's, signalising that and other faults in the measure. The ministry determined on dissolving. The general election echoed the disapproval of Parliament when the new House of Commons met. A motion of want of confidence proposed by Lord Hartington was carried, and Lord Derby and his colleagues resigned. The new ministry, with Lord Palmerston at its head, brought the Whigs and Peelites together once more in the same Government, Mr. Milner Gibson and Mr. Villiers representing the Radical party in a Cabinet which Mr. Cobden declined to enter, and which Mr. Bright was not invited to join.

The great achievements of this ministry were like those of the Aberdeen Cabinet, the financial measures of Mr. Gladstone, including the negotiation, mainly through Mr. Cobden, of the treaty of commerce with France. Out of doors the country was stirred by Mr. Bright's agitation for household suffrage and a redis-

tribution ; and divided by the conflict of opinion to which the American civil war gave rise. Considering the sentiments of his party, whose passions were as fiercely enlisted on the side of the slave-holders as they are now on behalf of the Turks, Lord Beaconsfield's reticence is deserving of credit. He probably had some sympathy with the territorial democracy of the North, and no particular liking for the Southern oligarchy. It would have been too much to expect him to try and give right moral guidance to his party. It is to his credit that he did not flatter and inflame their prejudices and passions. During the whole of Lord Palmerston's administration, it was Lord Beaconsfield's humour to affect a sort of patronage of the Prime Minister, to represent him as the Conservative chief of a Liberal government, obeying the leader of the Opposition, and holding in check his own revolutionary followers. Though the Liberals had place, which he did not envy them, the Tories had power ; and with this Lord Beaconsfield's noble and generous ambition was content. It was reserved for him to show for yet the third time that place without power was not absolutely unendurable, and that a Conservative ministry in a minority was more to his

mind. Lord Palmerston's death, in 1865, terminated the period of rest and thankfulness. Lord Russell succeeded his old colleague, of whom he had been alternately leader and follower, a cordial friend and an intimate enemy; and with his return to the Premiership, he returned to his first love, Reform. That was the question to which Lord Russell's character and ambition, his convictions, and his natural desire, quickened by previous failures, to complete his own great measure, gave new prominence. Mr. Gladstone's assumption of the leadership of the Government and the Liberal party in the House of Commons, practically made the ministry, slight as were the personal changes in its composition, a new one, and created a new Liberalism. We need not record the intrigues, and the secessions into the cave of Adullam, which defeated the Reform Bill of 1866, and the Government with it, and once more recalled Lord Derby and Mr. Disraeli to office; nor the chapter of accidents and surprises in the House of Commons, and the agitation and threatened tumult out of doors, which made Lord Derby the sponsor of household suffrage, and enabled Lord Beaconsfield to boast that after all the Tories were, as he had always declared, the

national party, whose policy was that of trust in the people.

In spite of defeats on vital questions of policy, and notably on the question of the Disestablishment of the Irish Church, Mr. Disraeli, whom Lord Derby's retirement had elevated to the Premiership, persisted in retaining office, and keeping in his own hands the settlement of the Reform question by those Scotch and Irish Bills which were the necessary accompaniment of the English measure. Nothing but a direct vote of want of confidence would have led to his retirement. This he magniloquently and safely challenged. Seeing that the party of resistance to the encroachments of the democracy, and to the degradation of the franchise, were prepared to concede household suffrage, it would have been folly to have given them the opportunity, pretty certain to be used, of resisting it anew, and with the aid of the Adullamites successfully; or to have encountered the disturbances, difficulties, and uncertainties of a dissolution. It was better that the Whigs should be dished, than that a great reform should be marred and hindered. Lord Beaconsfield missed an opportunity for the display of that generosity which he would have shown if he had

imitated in regard to Mr. Bright and Parliamentary Reform, the language in which Sir Robert Peel spoke of Mr. Cobden and free trade. He connected his own name, though nothing else, with a really great political measure, and kept the management of the election of 1868 in his hands. The prediction attributed to him of the immediate entrance of a Conservative administration on a term of office as lasting as that of Lord Liverpool's government, did not make in 1868 the first step towards its verification. An overwhelming defeat in the polling booths terminated, by a sort of national vote of censure, the existence of an inglorious and apostate administration. Lord Beaconsfield bowed to the decision of the country without waiting for its formal ratification in the House of Commons; and Mr. Gladstone became Prime Minister by the distinct designation of the newly created constituencies. The great measures which marked the course of the new Government need not be recounted, nor need we dwell upon the great errors which weakened its strength, culminating in the error which at the least expedient moment led to Mr. Gladstone's appeal to the country. A momentary impulse on the part of the Prime Minister coincided with a

probably only temporary mood of irritation in the nation, and the dismissal which Mr. Gladstone had welcomed in advance, and had almost solicited, was vouchsafed him.

Imitating the example of very doubtful constitutional expediency set by Lord Beaconsfield in 1867, Mr. Gladstone in the beginning of 1874 resigned without waiting for a formal vote of want of confidence on the part of the House of Commons. It is to be hoped that there will be no further and future imitation of this double precedent. The fiction that the House of Commons is a freely deliberating assembly, judging after debate, and on the merits of the question submitted to it, is a convenient and healthy one. It is vital indeed to Parliamentary rule. Simply to count up the election returns, and to forecast future votes by reference to party organization and candidature, is to make a dangerous approach to the plebiscitary system of government. It is desirable that a ministry, presumably defeated at the polling booths, should meet the House of Commons, to which it is immediately responsible, and should keep and lay down office at its direct bidding. It is the duty of the head of a government, to vindicate its measures and policy before

Parliament, and in justifying its conduct in the past, to indicate for the party which it represents the principles by which it will be guided, and the application which it will make of those principles in the future. Such a statement by Mr. Gladstone, at the opening of the session of 1874, in the only place in which he and his antagonists could meet face to face, would have possessed historic value, and would possibly have had an effect on public and parliamentary opinion, which might have helped to restrain some of the wilder eccentricities and extravagances of his successor. It would at any rate have been a dignified ending to a great ministerial career.

In forming his Cabinet, Lord Beaconsfield had the good sense to restrict its numbers, even below the mystic thirteen which used to be its outside limit before it reached the unwieldy size of recent governments. Twelve is a sacred number both in Hebrew and English history; and to this number the Cabinet was restricted until Lord Sandon became its thirteenth member or odd man. Before this, it seemed as if Lord Beaconsfield held the old superstition that it is unlucky to sit down thirteen at a table; and the supposititious thirteenth member of the Cabinet no

doubt looked upon his more fortunate brethren much as the occupant of the forty-first arm-chair in the French Academy regards the favoured forty immortals. It is to be hoped that Lord Beaconsfield's example will be followed when the next Liberal Cabinet is formed. It will require some courage to resist the claims of long-established and respectable failures. The want of homogeneity in the Liberal party, and its division into strongly marked sections of opinion, each with a fair title to representation in the Cabinet, make the restriction of its numbers difficult. But if it is to retain authority and efficiency, the widening and weakening process to which it has been submitted by Liberal Prime Ministers must be checked. It is easy to soothe disappointed ambition by peerages and orders:

> "Nor mean the gift the royal grace affords,
> All shall be knights save those that shall be lords."

The upper chamber seems to have been providentially preserved as a place of honourable exile. It is much better than the Turkish system, which sends a discredited Pacha to govern a remote and barbarous province. Unfortunately, Lord Beaconsfield does

not confine himself to the distribution of titles and ribbons, which seem to have the same attraction for English politicians as strings of beads and painted glass have for more savage chieftains. Not content with a wide distribution of these baubles, Lord Beaconsfield offered more substantial consolations to the wounded feelings of disappointed colleagues. The appointments of Lord Hampton and Sir Seymour Fitzgerald to lucrative commissionerships, for which neither of them had the slightest qualification, were only conspicuous illustrations, two instances, among many,—of a deliberate return to the worst abuses of patronage as it was exercised before the Reform Bill. Lord Beaconsfield exhibited, in the formation of his ministry, the disposition, which he satirized in *Vivian Grey*, of a plebeian Prime Minister to surround himself with great nobles and social magnates. He is his own Mr. Beckendorff. The attitude of the English aristocracy towards him displays, in return, that fidelity which he says, in his *Life of Lord George Bentinck*, that great nobles are always ready to show to a chief not of their own order. Lord Beaconsfield's subsequent experience has probably verified his statement. One instance is at the

very moment very conspicuous. It is no secret that Lord Beaconsfield had great difficulty in inducing some eminent politicians, on whose assistance he set the highest value, to take office—not, as on previous occasions, with him, but distinctly under him. Lord Salisbury, in particular, it is believed, was captured with the utmost difficulty, and, for some time, seemed to be but imperfectly tamed. Now he has been completely subdued.

Though not Prime Minister for the first time in 1874, Lord Beaconsfield was then for the first time Prime Minister with a working and thoroughly disciplined and docile majority in both Houses, and with the support, sometimes ostentatiously vaunted, at other times significantly hinted, of the Crown and the Court. Since the fall of Sir Robert Peel's administration, in 1846, no Government had had the same combination of advantages. Lord Beaconsfield had previously shown the greatest skill as a leader of opposition and of Governments which, without any violent straining of words, may be said to have been practically in opposition since they were confronted by a hostile majority in the House of Commons. He had proved himself to be a master of the arts of delay

and of evasion, skilful in playing off one section of his opponents against another. Under Lord Derby's successive governments and his own first administration, barren sessions and insufficient work were excused as the inevitable consequences of their position. It had now to be seen whether, with all the instruments in his hand which Sir Robert Peel had used with such benefit to the public, and which no minister since Sir Robert Peel had possessed, he could transact the business of the country, or even conduct business in the House. In Mr. Cross he had probably the best Home Secretary since Sir George Lewis, perhaps since Sir James Graham. The Exchequer, and the Colonial and Indian Offices, were filled with more than usual efficiency, and, under any other Prime Minister than Lord Beaconsfield himself, Lord Derby would probably have been a sound and judicious Foreign Secretary of the Aberdeen type. Some injustice has possibly been done to Lord Derby. While he was in office the world saw how little he did. Since his retirement from the Foreign Secretaryship, and Lord Salisbury's appointment, it has had means of knowing how much he may have hindered. Lord Cairns may claim a place among the great Chancellors and polit-

ical lawyers. In spite of these aids, Lord Beaconsfield's conduct of business in the House of Commons during the sessions of 1874, 1875, and 1876, was a failure. He has never, as we have said, been a master of details, he has never been interested in them, he has seldom taken the pains to acquaint himself with them, and all the pains and skill of the able man of business who was at that time Secretary of the Treasury, and who has since been deservedly promoted to one of the great offices of State, were unable to prevent his erratic leader from traversing and overthrowing the careful and difficult arrangements which had been minutely concerted beforehand. Lord Beaconsfield's tact and skill in dealing with persons, his knowledge of the feelings of the House and of its different sections, his powers of adroit flattery and delicate irony, amusing and stingless when he chooses that it shall be so, would probably have prevented the scenes of anarchy and confusion which have marred the consideration and repute of the House of Commons during the present and previous session of Parliament. The Irish obstructives have been able to obstruct because the leader of the House of Commons has been helpless, and its presid-

ing officers have been, capriciously and in turn, peremptory and lax. But Lord Beaconsfield did not conduct public business in the House, and scarcely affected to do so. The failure was due, in a considerable degree, no doubt, to the declining health and strength which led him to retire from it. It was also owing largely to the fact that Lord Beaconsfield evidently considered the office of Prime Minister as chiefly desirable because it enabled him to exercise a paramount control over foreign affairs, and to devote himself to those considerations of high imperial policy as he regards them, in which for four or five years he has been absorbed. One of his political heroes is Lord Carteret, who anticipated the present leader of the Liberal party in the title of Earl Granville. "What is it to me," said Carteret, when some one came to him about business which he thought beneath him, "who is a judge or who is a bishop? It is my business to make kings and emperors, and to maintain the balance of Europe." This seems to be Lord Beaconsfield's idea of a Prime Minister's office.

The history of Lord Beaconsfield's second administration is the history of the Eastern Question. In regard to it, his statesmanship seems the product rather

of an erratic Oriental imagination than of a European intelligence. He has introduced the wild dreams and projects of his Eastern heroes into the practical politics of the West. Years ago he published a prophetic burlesque of his own present policy, with the fantastic exaggerations which are habitual to him, but which are not incompatible with his own deep-seated belief that there is truth beneath the extravagance. The only difference between the scheme to which Lord Beaconsfield has given effect, and that which the Emir Fakredeen propounded to Tancred is the difference between reality and bold caricature:—"The Queen will listen to what you say, especially if you speak to her as you speak to me, and say such fine things in such a beautiful voice. Nobody ever opened my mind like you. You will magnetize the Queen as you have magnetized me. Go back to England and arrange this. . . . . You must perform the Portuguese scheme on a great scale; quit a petty and exhausted position for a vast and prolific empire. Let the Queen of the English collect a great fleet, let her stow away all her treasure, bullion, gold plate, and precious arms, be accompanied by all her court and chief people, and transfer the seat of her Empire

from London to Delhi. There she will find an immense empire ready-made, a first-rate army, and a large revenue. . . . . We acknowledge the Empress of India as our suzerain, and secure for her the Levantine Coast. If she likes she shall have Alexandria as she now has Malta; it could be arranged. . . . . You see! the greatest empire that ever existed; besides which she gets rid of the embarrassment of her Chambers! And quite practicable; for the only difficult part, the conquest of India, which baffled Alexander, is all done." Lord Beaconsfield is probably never so sincere as when he is talking nonsense, conscious that there is some nonsense in what he is saying, but believing that there is at bottom a great deal more truth. The secret of some of his wildest freaks of policy is to be found in the most grotesque passages of his old novels. There lie the ideas which, after a half or a quarter of a century's patient waiting, he endeavours to carry out. Already the Emir Beaconsfield has given effect to a large part of the scheme of the Emir Fakredeen. We have an Empress of India. The convention with Turkey gives England the protectorate and the reversion of the sovereignty of the Levant, and, indeed, of the

whole of Asiatic Turkey. Negotiations were at one time in progress which would have given us Alexandria, as we now have Malta. To avoid wounding French susceptibilities, we have taken Cyprus instead. The capital of the empire has not yet been transferred from London to Delhi; but Indian troops have been summoned to fight our battles in Europe, and the first step has been taken towards making England, in a military sense, dependent upon what used to be her dependency of India. Above all, the Emir Beaconsfield has done something to get rid of the embarrassment of the English Chambers, and the Chambers have acquiesced in a series of unconstitutional invasions and evasions of their legitimate authority, which, if the precedents now set were followed, would seriously limit the scope and efficiency of parliamentary control.

If Lord Beaconsfield were anything more than a grotesque foreign accident in our English political history—if, in the nature of things, he could have successors—the situation, not without danger as it is, but still more ridiculous and annoying than dangerous, would be fraught with grave peril. Lord Beaconsfield's peculiar genius was under restraint, when

he held only the second place in Conservative Governments and the Conservative party, and when he had to face and defer to a critical and suspicious, and occasionally a directly hostile parliamentary majority. Since the beginning of 1874, he has been delivered from any checks, save those which, at particular periods, have been imposed upon him by the roused feeling of the country. These, however, from the very nature of popular impulses, have acted only from time to time. Bowing to the storm, he has let it pass, and when it has gone its way, has resumed his suspended, but never abandoned, purpose. He has known how to appeal to the blatant and blustering Chauvinism of the coarsest and least educated part of every class in the community, from the highest to the lowest. The noisiest and vulgarest noblemen and the noisiest and vulgarest mobsmen have been upon his side. A too timid parliamentary Opposition has not exercised even such imperfect control as would have been possible to higher courage and steadier persistence. The one statesman who has set himself, in defiance of insult and clamour, to oppose the prevailing madness, has addressed a wearied and exhausted condition of popular intelligence and feel-

ing. The only elements of resistance in the Cabinet have been got rid of, and Lord Beaconsfield has found himself the sole Minister as completely as ever Walpole was. Lord Salisbury has been content to walk as the first and most distinguished captive in his triumphal procession. England has played, during the last four or five years, that part in the affairs of Europe which Lord Beaconsfield wished that it should play, and it closely resembles that which he has chosen for himself. It has been reduced into swagger and self-assertion, a determination to push to the front, merely for the sake of being there and of being pointed to, talked of, and wondered at. The nation has been dressed up in the tawdry finery of titles borrowed from imperial France and imperial Hayti; ridiculous orders for women have been invented; the theatrical mission to Berlin has been devised; a grotesque and fantastic imagination has been allowed free play. M. Jourdain, habited as the great Mamamouchi, was not more ridiculously accoutred than this sober and historic nation now is with Eastern robe and diadem.

Lord Beaconsfield's resources of dextrous charlatanism show no signs of exhaustion. He is justified

in a contemptuous confidence in the gullibility of this nation, which allows him to govern it. The sentiment which his own Hebrew Besso inscribed on the wall of his house when Contarini Fleming visited it, and which was to be seen there still, when Tancred made his pilgrimage to Jerusalem, declared—"I will not believe in those who must believe in me." It was intended to express the attitude of Judaism to Christianity. With very little alteration, it will probably convey Lord Beaconsfield's feeling towards his English worshippers and followers. He cannot easily believe in those who believe in him. In the meantime, Lord Beaconsfield's adventures are not over; the last chapter of them remains to be written. The materials for it are accumulating, and the story may reach a new point by the time these words are before the eyes of the reader; but it cannot yet be fully told, nor its moral completely drawn.

END.

DA564 .B3P7
The political adventures of Lord
Princeton Theological Seminary–Speer Library
1 1012 00002 9274